

**Narrating Sentiment in**  
***Mason & Dixon:***  
**A Modernist Novel of Feeling**

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Only when we realize that what words refer to are other words, that any speech-act in reference to experience is always a 'saying in other words', can we return to a true freedom. It is within the language system alone that we possess liberties of construction and of deconstruction, of remembrance and of futurity, so boundless, so dynamic, so proper to the evident uniqueness of human thought and imagining that, in comparison, external reality, whatever that might or might not be, is little more than brute intractability and deprivation.

George Steiner

We all experience within us what the Portuguese call *saudade*, an inexplicable longing, an unnamed and enigmatic yearning of the soul, and it is this feeling that lives in the realms of imagination and inspiration, and is the breeding ground for the sad song, for the love song.... But all in all it would appear that *duende* is too fragile to survive the compulsive modernity of the music industry. In the hysterical technocracy of modern music, sorrow is sent to the back of the class, where it sits, pissing its pants in mortal terror.

Nick Cave

Even though the postmodern seems different from modernism...the "sentimental" continues to call up an image of critical agreement that makes further elaboration seem unnecessary. The sentimental is here connected loosely to a version of liberal humanism: valuing the individual, intrinsic value, emotion or pathos, the endorsement of niceness and cooperation, and the family farm.... As a literate audience, we are expected to agree – we are reconstructed as agreeing – that it's a weakness to wish for any of these; it's part of being in the discursive community of the tough and the critical.... Becoming an intellectual in America is sort of like being inducted into the army (or maybe the first grade) and learning not to be a sissy.

Suzanne Clark

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## Abstract

This thesis approaches Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Mason & Dixon*, in terms of its narrative structure and sentimental content. Pynchon is generally regarded as a challenging and innovative writer, so narrative is an unsurprising subject for a study of his most recent work; sentimentalism, on the other hand, is a far cry from traditional approaches to his writing. Despite this, however, as I outline in my introduction, sentimentalism has long hovered around the edges of Pynchon's work. In *Mason & Dixon* it takes a privileged role as the dominating mood of the novel's final section, "Last Transit." This sentimentalism, far from being the retrogressive move that the term might imply, is bound up in a radically reconceived approach to the narrating voice of novelistic discourse, whence comes the unifying feature of my study.

In *Mason & Dixon*, I identify this unity in the novel's referencing of film, long-established as one of Pynchon's major cultural influences. In my first chapter, I outline my approach to sentimentalism and narrative—in the modern and, specifically, modernist novel, as well as in contemporary film. In chapter two I outline my conception of *Mason & Dixon*'s narrator as emulating film's visual representations; in chapter three, I explore this narrator as a "radically underdetermined" identity, who represents, not a linguistically embodied subjectivity, but rather representation as its own agent, as representation itself. In my fourth and final chapter, I examine how this narrator manages the sentimental content of the novel, concentrating on the character of Mason.

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## Notes on the Text

- Added ellipses to quotations from Pynchon's works are enclosed in square brackets because of the predominance of these in his writing; quoted material from other sources is treated in the conventional manner.
- Parenthetical page references to *Mason & Dixon* are given in the text; all other references, and multiple references from *Mason & Dixon*, are in the footnotes.
- Parenthetical dates in the text refer, where possible, to the original date of publication of the given work or, if appropriate, to the date of its composition; for those works dealt with in translation, this date refers to the original publication or composition in the original language. Where this is not possible, such as in the case of an anthology, the date given is that of the work as in my "Works Consulted."
- Throughout this thesis I use Gérard Genette's narratological categories to refer to narrators and narrated situations. An extradiegetic narrator performs their act of narration "outside" the text—they are of "this" world. The narrative they tell is a diegetic narrative. An intradiegetic narrator performs within a diegetic narrative. The narrative they tell is a metadiegetic narrative. Beyond this, a metadiegetic narrator performs within a metadiegetic narrative, and the narrative they tell is a meta-metadiegetic narrative.

A heterodiegetic narrator is *not* present as a character in the narrative they tell. A homodiegetic narrator *is* present as a character in the narrative they tell. The four primary terms can be combined as: extra-heterodiegetic, extra-homodiegetic, intra-heterodiegetic, and intra-homodiegetic. In the table below are examples of these narrators, familiar from novelistic tradition. "Voice" refers to the hetero-/homodiegetic; "level" to the extra-/intradiegetic.<sup>1</sup>

Voice/Level	Extradiegetic	Intradiegetic
Heterodiegetic	Narrator of <i>Light in August</i>	Ivan Karamazov telling his "Grand Inquisitor" tale
Homodiegetic	Nick Carraway	Marlow

I discuss films in conjunction with fiction and, for consistency's sake, apply Genette's terms in reference to primary and secondary narratives in film even where they are not, strictly speaking, narrated.

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<sup>1</sup> This summary and table is adapted from Genette, *ND* 227-37; 243-52.



# Introduction

Jonathan Franzen's novel, *The Corrections* (2001), created something of a media storm when it was selected for Oprah Winfrey's Book Club, only for the author to react disparagingly to this "populist" endorsement. *The Corrections*, which explores the dynamics of a Midwestern American family in which each member is dealing with existential questions about the meaning of their lives, can reasonably be described as a sentimental melodrama. Exploring the dynamics of this novel, the September 2001 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, says that

there's something thrilling, heartening, and inspiring about seeing life revealed so accurately, so transparently — and finally, so forgivingly. Finishing *The Corrections*, we feel (as we do in real life) awe and profound respect for the bravery and resilience of the deeply flawed human beings who manage to be born, and die, and survive all the moments between.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly every word in this description touches on an element of the complex of ideas and emotions that we associate with the sentimental: life and (particularly) death; transparency; reality; bravery; heart; forgiveness; and, in all these, profundity. At the same time, of course, the sentimental is a widely disparaged mode, associated with emotionalism, escapism, inauthenticity and femininity. Franzen's discomfort at being celebrated by a sentimentalising figure from daytime (and hence "women's") television highlights the tensions that continue to surround ideas of the sentimental, which remains anathema to modernist seriousness. Franzen's own reflections on this affair provide a useful way into introducing this thesis, which is concerned with the dynamic between modernist narrative and sentimentalism in Thomas Pynchon's novel,

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<sup>1</sup> "Shot Through the Heart."

*Mason & Dixon* (1997). Seemingly antithetical, the modernist and the sentimental are nonetheless potentially reconcilable, and Franzen's own confusion as to his novel's status in this respect touches on some of the key tensions at work here.

Writing a retrospective account of his experiences as one of "Oprah's authors," being filmed "returning" to his home-town, St. Louis, Franzen evinces his frustration at having his, and his family's, personal history reduced to evocative, yet contrived, sentimental images for television. Towards the end of this article, the narrated time of which predates his much-discussed *faux pas*, Franzen projects forward in time and explains that *faux pas* in these terms:

Beginning the next night, in Chicago, I'll encounter two kinds of readers in signing lines and in interviews. One kind will say to me, essentially, "I like your book and I think it's wonderful that Oprah picked it," the other kind will say, "I like your book and I'm so sorry that Oprah picked it." And, because I'm a person who instantly acquires a Texas accent in Texas, I'll respond in kind to each kind of reader. When I talk to admirers of Winfrey, I'll experience a glow of gratitude and good will and agree that it's wonderful to see television expanding the audience for books. When I talk to detractors of Winfrey, I'll experience the bodily discomfort I felt when we were turning my father's oak tree into schmalz, and I'll complain about the Book Club logo. I'll get in trouble for this. I'll achieve unexpected sympathy for Dan Quayle when, in a moment of exhaustion in Oregon, I conflate "high modern" and "art fiction" and use the term "high art" to describe the importance of Proust and Kafka and Faulkner to my writing. I'll get in trouble for this, too. Winfrey will disinvite me from her show because I seem "conflicted." I'll be reviled from coast to coast by outraged populists. I'll be called a "motherfucker" by an anonymous source in New York, a "pompous prick" in *Newsweek*, an "ego-blinded snob" in the *Boston Globe*, and a "spoiled, whiny little brat" in the *Chicago Tribune*. I'll consider the possibility, and to some extent believe, that I am all of these things. I'll repent and explain and qualify, to little avail. My rash will fade as mysteriously as it blossomed; my sense of dividedness will only deepen.<sup>2</sup>

There is clear manipulation going on here. As I will discuss much later in this thesis, a shift like this into the future simple tense is able to create a touching sense of history as contained and inevitable: at once accessible and known, but also beyond the scope of human freedom. This is an essential feature of

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<sup>2</sup> Franzen, "Meet me in St. Louis."

the sentimental, which manifests as an asymptotic reaching towards a secular agape and which involves also a sense of loss at the inherent impossibility of an absolute meeting between the feeling self and the other (be it another subject, a fictional figure, or an ideology). In the above quote, Franzen is of course not writing fiction, but rather emphasising the inevitability of “real” history. His readers *already know what happened*, meaning that what was once literary gossip, in this form becomes an account of personal struggle – against the self, against history – from a subjective, foregrounded point of view:

*Franzen* did not create himself, nor did he create history, but, pitiful human subject, he wandered blindly into consciousness and contingency. Franzen is here acknowledging the possibility that he is a “deeply flawed human being,” who, like us, is merely surviving all the moments between life and death, and this heartening transparency moves us to forgiveness.

This may seem flippant, but that is not my intention: there is no doubt Franzen *was* conflicted, and it is only the legacy of intellectual anti-sentimentalism that allows us to entertain the possibility of condemning someone for using rhetorical appeals to elucidate their situation. At the same time, though, for my own rhetorical purposes I want to establish a sense of the variety of sentimental discourse that surrounds this affair, from the gushingly platitudinous of Oprah’s magazine to the subtly manipulative of Franzen’s self-deprecatory self-defence. The questions I want to approach here regard Franzen’s “sense of dividedness.” Where does this come from, and why does it so disturb him? Why will it “only deepen”? Why, that is, does Franzen’s debt to Proust, Kafka and Faulkner sit so ill with the kind of literature he manifestly wants to write, and why does it create this ambivalence in the face of the positive audience response that his novel generates?

Franzen’s own dwelling on these questions is clearly evident in another article he wrote, nearly a year later, where he approaches the issue of literary

snobbery through his own experiences with the works of William Gaddis.<sup>3</sup> In this piece Franzen works through these issues in terms of what he calls the “Status” and “Contract” models of narrative fiction, the former inviting “a discourse of genius and art-historical importance,” and the latter creating “a pleasurable experience.” Franzen acknowledges that he has been drawn to the ideology of status but admits that “[i]n my bones...I’m a contract kind of person.” Implicit in his discussion, however, is a sense of the arbitrariness and intractability of these questions, which is brought out in terms of *The Corrections*: some readers, we learn, found the novel difficult, as he finds Gaddis difficult, and condemned him as he goes on to condemn Gaddis. At the same time, though, the spectre of Oprah’s endorsement, and the resulting fall-out, hangs over the article, reminding us that, apparently to Franzen’s status-driven disquiet, many non-specialist and non-academic readers actually enjoyed his novel. The point that Franzen seems to be circling around here, without stating it as such, is that for the genuinely engaged reader there is always a contract, and if a novel is difficult to the point of incomprehension, that contract has broken down. Although Franzen does end up rejecting Gaddis, this seems for the most part a personal revelation, and he only suggests condemning him more thoroughly on the basis of the postulate that Gaddis wrote novels that he himself would not enjoy reading: “this violates what seems to me the categorical imperative for any fiction writer. This is the ultimate breach of contract.” While apparently unable to avoid this moralising conclusion, the subtext of Franzen’s article points to a deeper undermining of his paradigm: who, ultimately, has the authority to deny the validity of another’s contract?<sup>4</sup>

Franzen’s argument here can be read as a rear-guard rejection of the common (though possibly largely unstated) belief that “easy” fiction is liable

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<sup>3</sup> Franzen, “Mr. Difficult.”

<sup>4</sup> Franzen also fails to consider that the “difficult” texts he refers to might create their contracts within their own narrative style, rather than importing them wholesale from tradition, a feature perhaps more modernist than postmodernist – the latter term being how he describes these texts.

to be sentimental, while “difficult” modernist or postmodernist fiction defines itself in direct opposition to this possibility. The sentimental is so loaded with pejorative connotations (despite the ubiquity in Western cultures of what it signifies) that he is unlikely to use it in reference either to his own writing or to writing he enjoys. However, he is surely doing nothing other than defending the sentimental experience of narrative when he shores up the morality of the contract by averring that “[j]ust because you’re touched where you want to be touched, it doesn’t mean you’re cheap.”

When Franzen concedes that “in his bones” he is a contract person, he boldly elaborates by listing “difficult” novels that he has begun but never finished. Included in this list is *Mason & Dixon*, but, as I will be arguing in this thesis, had he finished it, and established with this novel the kind of contract it demands, Franzen may have been surprised to discover a novel that is both “difficult” in the sense of modernist/postmodernist narrative innovation, yet also one that purveys a sentimentalism that relies on its richly developed characters, which is what, Franzen tells us, he enjoys in fiction.

While Franzen eulogises modernism but has little patience for the “difficult” postmodern novel (he regards Gaddis’s first novel, *The Recognitions*, which he enjoyed, as modernist, but the remainder of his *oeuvre* as postmodernist, characterising this as setting out capriciously to break contracts with the reader), in this thesis my approach to Pynchon’s narrative innovation places it within the modernist tradition. Although historically postmodern, and hugely informed by postmodern cultural conditions, Pynchon’s attitude to narrative form is most usefully viewed in terms of the modernist avant-garde. Indeed, the postmodern dialogue with modernism is largely ambivalent because of the degree to which the modernist impulse still resides behind so much of the cultural production (both “high” and “low” forms) and its reception in the West today. However, this legacy is manifested less in terms of modernist elitism (which the postmodern ostensibly rejects and undermines) than in the more innocent-seeming sphere of its aesthetic tradition. However disturbed we may be by some of the excesses of modernist

ideology, we are less inclined to dismiss the artistic production it spawned. We read "The Dead" (1914) as a remarkable testament to Joyce's mastery of the nineteenth-century form, but we cannot help valuing more highly his work that proceeded from this; Duchamp's "Fountain" (1917) retains an elusive aura, despite nearly a century of redundant imitations, owing to the vigour and profundity of the gesture; and modernist painting, from Van Gogh to Pollock, has bequeathed an undeniable language of expression to subsequent generations. As with punk, there is a seductiveness about avant-gardism, which has given it a prominence in our cultural matrix that goes beyond the contingencies of fashion: it is built into the very framework of fashion, its indispensable social *raison d'être*, representing a contemptuously elusive vision of the possible. The ongoing narrative innovations of the modernist novel represent an astonishing cultural and artistic movement that tests the limits of representation in prose while attempting, against all odds, to establish narration, divorced from what it narrates, as an artistic medium in its own right. Readers' pleasure in modernist fiction ultimately derives from their awe at the unrelenting audacity of this struggle.

In this respect, it is difficult to concur wholeheartedly with Franzen's claim in "Mr. Difficult" that fiction is ultimately "conservative and conventional" and that "to wrest the novel away from its original owner, the bourgeois reader, requires strenuous effort from theoreticians. And once literature and criticism become co-dependent the fallacies set in." The "bourgeois reader," Franzen does not acknowledge, is as likely today to be drawn to status writing as they are to contract writing, just as there is no shame today in taking an academic interest in popular culture. While we have all encountered academic literary criticism, and Franzen quotes some, that seems drawn to the difficult for the sake of vicarious status, at the same time I recall how true rings Molly Hite's surprise at finding that "Pynchon is frequently criticized for being the academic's academic, the writer whose books are intended to be taught, not read. For a long time, the most ardent

Pynchon fans that I knew were a weight lifter, a short-order cook, and a pizza deliveryman.”<sup>5</sup>

Throughout “Mr. Difficult,” Pynchon is the writer that Franzen most often couples with Gaddis, as though the two were almost interchangeable. This, I think, reflects a common misconception of Pynchon, which Hite alludes to: that he is an impenetrable novelist who takes delight in making the reader’s experience a difficult and dissatisfying one – a quintessentially postmodern “game player.” On the contrary, the consistently surprising and delightful thing about Pynchon is the way his novels open up to meaningfulness once the reader’s contract has been established, although this is never achieved without some initial confusion and hard work. A related misconception can be found in another comment Franzen makes about Pynchon while being interviewed about *The Corrections*: “I’m essentially participating in one of those swings, a swing away from the boys-will-be-boys *Huck Finn* thing, which is how you can view Pynchon, as adventures for boys out in the world. At a certain point, you get tired of all that. You come home.”<sup>6</sup> Again we can see a privileging of the homely in Franzen’s attitude, as well as a belief that Pynchon represents an oppositional voice to this, a belief that is not justified if we reflect on Pynchon’s work, in which overt sentimentalism can be detected as early as “The Secret Integration” (1964), a work that Pynchon “like[s] more than dislike[s].”<sup>7</sup>

It is not romanticism, furthermore, nor gratuitous anti-sentimentalism, that keeps Slothrop from coming home in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973); this is a serious novel about the very real alienation wrought by war and military-industrial society, and a sentimental ending seeing Slothrop reunited with Tantivy and returning to Mingeborough would quite simply undermine the seriousness of the work. Benny Profane, who is identified in *V.’s* (1961) first

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<sup>5</sup> Hite ix.

<sup>6</sup> Antrim.

<sup>7</sup> Pynchon, *SL* 20.

paragraph as “[g]iven to sentimental impulses,”<sup>8</sup> discovers by the end of the novel that “all his homes are temporary,” meaning it is inevitable, rather than misguidedly romantic, that he would allow New York “and its one livable inner space and one unconnable (therefore hi-valu) girl”<sup>9</sup> to slide away. The yo-yoing schlemihl finds a sentimental home in transience, in his ability to pick up random girls and make himself “at home” anywhere. His “fabulous experiences” are not “adventures for boys out in the world,” because, like those the romantic would revile for staying at home, as he tells Brenda, “offhand I’d say I haven’t learned a goddamn thing.”<sup>10</sup>

*Vineland* (1990), it hardly needs saying, has an overtly sentimental bias, based precisely around returning home – which possibly goes some way to explaining its unpopularity with Pynchon fans who cut their teeth on *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Indeed, it is fascinating to notice the extent to which *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon* are, despite being very different novels, closely related at certain key moments, in terms of both narrative style and content. The former element I will discuss briefly in chapters two and three, suggesting that at certain points the narrative of *Vineland* represents something of an impure dress-rehearsal for what Pynchon achieves in *Mason & Dixon*.<sup>11</sup>

*The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) and *Vineland* are probably Pynchon’s most postmodern novels, yet, interestingly, the former is his least sentimental (with the capriciousness of its inconclusive ending and the superficiality of its

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<sup>8</sup> Pynchon, V. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* 453.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* 454

<sup>11</sup> The latter element I do not have space to consider in detail here, but it extends from Zoyd’s “[l]ate hit” anticipating Mason’s “[u]nnannounc’d blow” (441), to Prairie’s attempting to “filter” Zoyd’s features out of her reflection “as a way to find the face of her mother in what was left,” which is an image that appears in the later novel when Mason “stares into his Mirror, memorizing his own face well enough to filter it out of Willy’s and Doc’s, leaving, if the Trick succeed, Rebekah’s alone, her dear living Face, — tho’ at about half the optickal Resolution, he guesses” (211). Further, when Frenesi glows “like a cheap woodstove” she looks forward to Eliza and Zsuzsa doing the same (540), and Takeshi’s “Karmic adjustment,” as well as his near-fatal doubling with Brock Vond, are reworked in *Mason & Dixon* as Zhang’s “Feng Shui jobs” and his evil double, The Wolf of Jesus. Pynchon, *Vineland* 30, 98, 362.



characters) while the latter (before *Mason & Dixon*'s publication) is his most. It is worth noting, then, that, firstly, *Lot 49* is the work where Pynchon considers that "I seem to have forgotten most of what I thought I'd learned,"<sup>12</sup> and, secondly, that it is the only Pynchon work that "moved" Franzen—because, he tells us, he "loved" Oedipa Mass. If the postmodern novel can be characterised by a habit of breaking contracts with its readers, this occurs more in *Lot 49* than it does in Pynchon's other works, although the contract-breaking is subtle: Pynchon in fact uses in this novel a fairly traditional narrating style and voice, which lures the reader (as it did Franzen) into the "natural" sympathy with its protagonist that we anticipate experiencing in the modern novel;<sup>13</sup> it is only on reflection that we wonder how much we actually know about Oedipa, the embarrassed "Young Republican,"<sup>14</sup> and how much, actually, we like her.

My point here is emphatically not to attack Franzen, either for his own writing or for his comments on writing: there is no reason anyone *should* read Gaddis or Pynchon, and there is no essential morality (although the modernists might disagree) in how one chooses to tell a story. Furthermore, *The Corrections* is a finely crafted novel with convincing characters, and its strength—a generally sentimental one—lies in its bringing the reader to a sympathetic understanding of its characters in a trajectory that merges ultimately with those characters' achieving a rapprochement with their own lives and with each other, emphasising the illusion of community that is the groundwork of the sentimental generally and of modern readers' sentimental experience of narrative fiction. The fact that this sentimental novel is popular, not only with Oprah but with academics in English departments, is a testament to Franzen's attunement to cultural moods, and I find it no less than intriguing that Pynchon and Franzen were each working on these novels of sentiment towards the end of the last, anti-sentimentalist, century.

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<sup>12</sup> Pynchon, *SL* 22.

<sup>13</sup> I use the term "modern novel" in this thesis to denote the tradition of narrative fiction in English arising around the middle of the eighteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> Pynchon, *Lot 49* 76.

What is most interesting for my purposes here is that in many respects the Oprah furore, and Franzen's discussions in the two articles and interview that I have cited, touch on, while not acknowledging, a great deal of what we talk about when we talk about the sentimental. Furthermore, the ultimate intractability of Franzen's various attempts to distinguish between modes of novel-writing points to the inescapability of the sentimental as a feature of narrative in the modern novel. Indeed, this tradition has an element of necessary sentimentalism built into it by the formal features that gave expression to the sentimental content characterising its earliest incarnations. That is, the importance of sentimental themes in the eighteenth-century novel required a narrative approach that made possible readers' sympathetic engagement with individual (and mundane) characters or narrating perspectives. While these themes may have been ostensibly rejected at an early stage in the novel's development, the survival of the genre implies, indeed necessitates, that the sentimental element subsists, concealed in the formal requirements of novelistic discourse. This covert, underlying sentimentalism, an inescapable feature of the generic requirements of the novel form itself, means, for the modernist novel, an unease about its own capacity for erupting into overt, or clichéd, sentimentalism. Such overt sentimentalism is the nemesis of the modernist and postmodernist novel, which protest too much against their own potential for these atavistic invasions of feeling. In both *Mason & Dixon* and *The Corrections* we find this embarrassment has been overcome, but what makes the former novel so interesting is that it achieves this unashamed sentimentalism while also contributing to the innovative agenda of the novelistic avant-garde.

This thesis, then, is interested in the fact that *Mason & Dixon* represents not only a sophisticated contribution to the ironic distancing and aestheticising involved in the development of the modernist novelistic narrative, but also, within this context, an unabashed attempt at rendering overt sentimentalism and moving the reader. My interest throughout will be directed at how the novel's avant-garde narrative structures actually allow

for, rather than debar, its sentimental content. Further, in my exegesis I will suggest how the covert and overt sentimentalism of the novel depends on a careful negotiation between the mutually sustaining concepts of form and content, how the manipulation of the relationship between these in *Mason & Dixon* underscores, simultaneously, both its effectively innovative narrative and its innovatively affective effects. Ultimately, the arguments I am making here reflect my own experience of the novel and the fact that it is still a relatively new work, not yet ten years past its first publication, and as such remains relatively free of a consensual critical vocabulary and perspective. My intention, as much as anything, is to contribute something towards the growth of such a vocabulary and perspective, at this point necessarily inchoate, which needs must arise from a subjective experience that I can only substantiate through evidence-based argument conducted in good faith. This is not as arbitrary as it might seem: in my first (and to a lesser extent my second) reading of *Mason & Dixon* I was, like Franzen apparently, alienated by its narrative to the point of being unsure of such basic factors as speakers' identities, plot developments and narrative perspectives;<sup>15</sup> while I was aware that elements of the novel's denouement seemed to intend an emotional (or sentimental) response from me, that response was not forthcoming. In further readings, as I developed an "ear" for the narrative and developed a contract with it, not only did I become more able to follow the essentials of the story, but I was also more deeply affected by what I now label as *Mason & Dixon's* sentimental content.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the approach to the novel that I take in this study, a discussion of the interplay between its narrative and its sentiment, is a reflection of the process by which I, as one of its first readers, became aware of *Mason & Dixon* as a meaningful work (as a novel) rather than merely as insignificant, impenetrable, status-seeking text.

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<sup>15</sup> Anecdotally, I have several acquaintances who have read to the end of the novel and frankly admit to having had no idea of what was going on.

<sup>16</sup> In this respect I cannot help but suspect that a more useful distinction for Franzen to make would be between novels whose contract indicates that they will be read only once and novels that negotiate their contract through multiple readings.

What I have come to learn from *Mason & Dixon* is how its humanist, sentimental content inheres in a tension-filled relationship with the opacity of its modernist representational strategies. In my first chapter, then, I will begin with an overview of the fraught relationship between modernist narrative and the sentimental, and how the former seems to forbid the latter through its alienating representational effects. However, I will also suggest that this impression is falsely maintained by the more mundane strategy of simply avoiding any call for sentimental seriousness, leaving open the possibility of sentimentalism within the innovative imperatives of modernist narrative. The more I have dwelt on it, the less satisfied I have become with the simplistic notion of “identification” used to describe the sentimental experience of narrative. Confronting this, I will take my cue from Robyn Warhol’s discussion in *Having a Good Cry* (2003) and limit (for the most part) my conception of the sentimental to the physiological sensations that are assumed to accompany the contemporary experience of sentiment. Confining my sense of the sentimental to the emotional response – yes, weeping – that attends my personal experience of particular moments in *Mason & Dixon*, I follow Warhol’s example by examining this in terms of the sentimental movie, looking in particular at how the response can be elicited even by the most absurdly contrived examples. Without attempting the impossible task of actually defining or accounting for the sentimental response, I will endeavour in this chapter to describe and interrogate the *process* of this response in respect to its most common manifestation in contemporary culture (the sentimental movie), leading me to conclude that it involves a dialectical tension abiding at the threshold of representation, a tension that enjoys a compelling synecdochical relationship with that long-time anxiety of sentimental philosophy, the impossibility of authentic or absolutely sympathetic inter-subjective identification.

This concentration on sentimental film is not an arbitrary move, firstly because the movie remains the sentimental form *par excellence* in Western culture, and more importantly because Pynchon’s literary *oeuvre* has moved

increasingly, at least since *Gravity's Rainbow*,<sup>17</sup> towards a prose version of cinematic narrative. The importance of this to *Mason & Dixon*'s narrative is central to my thesis, and my second and third chapters are devoted to the novel's narrative mechanics and voice, which, even more than Pynchon's earlier novels, emulate in the very ontology of their verbal representations the visual production of meaning on screen. Chapter two will begin with a discussion of the trend towards disembodiment of the narrative voice in modernist fiction. This will lead to my description of the technique in *Mason & Dixon* whereby the movement between diegetic frames gives Pynchon an opportunity to fundamentally undermine the privileged role of voice and diegetic level in the construction of narrating identity, by calling on the tradition of narrated flashbacks in film and leaving behind the novelistic version of this, as typified by the strong narrating presence of Marlow in the Conrad narratives we associate with this figure.

Chapter three will look more closely at the narrating figure (emphatically not Cherrycoke) that emerges from Pynchon's careful manipulations of voice and level. This figure, I will argue, enjoys a dual status: on the one hand he manifests the putative human subjectivity that we (with increasing uncertainty and embarrassment) ascribe to a narrating "figure" that evinces both consistency of voice and humanist insight; on the other hand he is radically underdetermined by his ambiguous, and contradictory, provenance from within the manifold subjective worlds that the novel implies. This chapter is close-grained and technical, but it is my conviction that a thorough analysis is called for in coming to terms with the extent of the ambiguity (and hence potentiality) that inheres in the narrator's subjectivity and representational scope. Throughout chapters two and three I will use Gérard Genette's categories of the homo- and heterodiegetic, and

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<sup>17</sup> On this topic see David Cowart's chapter, "'Making the Unreal Real': Film in *Gravity's Rainbow*" in Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon* 31-62. Charles Clerc returns to this theme in his article, "Film in *Gravity's Rainbow*" in Clerc, *Approaches* 103-51. For a discussion of film and *Vineland* see Stacey Olster's article, "When You're a (Nin)jette You're a (Nin)jette all the Way – Or Are You? Female Filmmaking in *Vineland*" in Green et al 119-34.

intra- and extradiegetic narrators,<sup>18</sup> which fall precisely into the site of deconstruction that *Mason & Dixon*'s narrator occupies and are therefore a useful tool, firstly for emphasising what is *not* happening in the novel's narration, and secondly for indicating thereby a sense of what *is* happening.

The discipline of narratology is clearly an important technical component of the conceptual background of this thesis, which is reflected in my use of Genette's insights. At the same time, however, a more profound, though less explicit influence is the work of Mikhael Bakhtin and his conception of the novel as an evolving form that is characterised by a "dialogic" representation of language as a social phenomenon. What I find in *Mason & Dixon* reflects a compelling contribution to the "unified whole" Bakhtin imagines as the life-world of novelistic discourse:

language itself, which everywhere serves as a means of direct expression, becomes in this new context the image of language, the image of the direct word. Consequently this extra-generic or inter-generic world is internally unified and even appears as its own kind of totality. Each separate element in it – parodic dialogue, scenes from everyday life, bucolic humor, etc. – is presented as if it were a fragment of some kind of unified whole. I imagine this whole to be something like an immense novel, multi-generic, multi-styled, mercilessly critical, soberly mocking, reflecting in all its fullness the heteroglossia and multiple voices of a given culture, people and epoch.<sup>19</sup>

As I will show, the radical disembodiment of *Mason & Dixon*'s narrator imbues him with a voice that calls up, through its representation of language *as* representation, any number of cultural discourses throughout the novel. As with Bakhtin's imagined "immense novel," *Mason & Dixon* evinces, within its narrative voice, *versions* or *representations* of the multifarious languages – the languages of television sitcoms, of cartoonish re-imaginings of history, or of serious drama, to name but a few – that constitute our contemporary cultural matrix.

My fourth and final chapter will approach the sentimentalism of *Mason & Dixon* through the lenses of its representational strategies that I will

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<sup>18</sup> See my "Notes on the Text" above, viii.

<sup>19</sup> "Epic and Novel." Bakhtin 59-60.

uncover in the preceding two chapters and with specific reference to the approach to the contemporary sentimental that I will outline in chapter one. The approach here will be to examine the way the reader's sense of character is mediated by the narrator, who has assumed a role of pure representation, the sentimentalism of the novel issuing from this liminal tension between perceived reality and the image of its representation. In this chapter I will trace, from the perspective of the final section of *Mason & Dixon*, Mason's subjective world, his relationships – with Rebekah, Dixon, his family and his profession – and his, and Dixon's, sentimentally mediated journeys into death.

In certain respects this thesis represents a preliminary reading of *Mason & Dixon*, but with a work of this magnitude, innovation and scope, the descriptive analysis that I have undertaken seems a necessary starting point for the development of fruitful academic discourse. I have chosen to look at the novel in terms of the seemingly unrelated spheres of narrative and sentiment because these two areas represent privileged zones within what it seems this novel is trying to do. I have found, and hope to convey, an intriguing dynamic between modes of representation and the sentimental experience. Furthermore, I have become deeply involved in a fictional world that is endlessly surprising, moving and entertaining, and it is my secondary hope that I may share some of that imaginative adventure with my reader.

## Section One

### *Chapter One: Narrating Sentiment*

#### **Pynchon's Sentimental Novel?**

The sentimentalism of *Mason & Dixon* – an invasion of tender feelings towards the novel's close, which affect and infect the reader – is an unexpected move from a novelist who is generally regarded as highly cerebral, cynical and alienating: a good modernist, in other words. Even the sentimentalism of *Vineland* is merely a fleeting (and somewhat ambivalent) image of homecoming and leftie American pastoralism: it does not move readers to tears. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, a basically bleak novel, there are moments of outstanding beauty in the prose, and a touching humanity does announce itself occasionally within the chaotic movement of the plot – but the narrated situation and the narrator's pervasive irony do not allow these moments to advance beyond a fleeting glimpse of sentimental potential.<sup>1</sup> The sentimental, indeed, is a profoundly over-determined concept, which has fared badly in the Western cultural climate of the twentieth century – from the aesthetic elitism of modernism to the studied ambivalence of postmodernism. For Thomas Pynchon, who has a foot in each of these camps, to write not only a sentimental novel, but one which also constitutes a major contribution to the modernist interrogation of narrative form, represents an intriguing literary moment and one that I will explore throughout this thesis. In this first chapter I will lay the groundwork for my discussion of *Mason & Dixon*, firstly with an overview of the historical fate of the sentimental, with specific reference to the

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<sup>1</sup> For a suggestive discussion of the sentimental tensions in *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Attewell.



modern and modernist novel, and from there I will outline an approach to *Mason & Dixon*'s sentimentalism in terms of the "tear-jerker" sentimental movie. It is my contention that this novel belongs ultimately to both of these traditions: through an emulation of the movie form, translated into novelistic narrative, *Mason & Dixon* is at once a contemporary sentimental tear-jerker and a modernist narrative of avant-garde innovation.

### **The Sentimental: Derided and Divided**

As Janet Todd (1986) points out, the anti-sentimentalist movement, which refers to the sentimental in a pejorative manner, arose alongside the burgeoning "cult of feeling" that is forever associated with the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. Indeed, writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were producing works that strike us today as singularly sentimental whilst avowing themselves opposed to sentimentalism in general.<sup>2</sup> The anti-sentimentalist argument, which remains popularly adhered to today, is uneasy with the perceived inauthenticity of the sentimental, with its social and political ineffectuality, and with the supposedly unwarranted self-satisfaction that accompanies sentimental feelings, a self-satisfaction that was built into the philosophical and social lauding of such sentimental emotions as sympathy and fellow-feeling within the context of the "cult of feeling."

In the first instance, sentiment in the novel was regarded as a quality inhering unproblematically within the text, something experienced by characters in respect to other characters or their society, and claims of authenticity or otherwise reflected this and were made in consideration solely of those characters and the events in which they were involved. This phenomenon can be attributed, firstly, to an unreflective approach to novelistic language (and language in general) that regards narrative discourse as an unrefracting window into the events being described, an approach that is the clear antithesis of literary critical attitudes today. More interestingly,

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<sup>2</sup> Todd 144.

though, for my purposes, it reflects the narrating strategies of early novels, which were intent on maintaining the illusion involved in what Michael Bell (1983) refers to as “affective verisimilitude,” the groundwork of realism, which insisted on the literal reality and truth of the fictional worlds being depicted. If this affective verisimilitude is successful and directs us, unmediated, into the working minds of its characters (a process exemplified by the epistolary novel), it is natural that our judgement seems reasonable in being brought to bear, unquestioningly, on those characters. In many respects, this attitude is still prevalent today, particularly in casual readings or theme-based discussions of novels that adhere to a more or less “traditional” narrating style, one that does not, that is, work to evoke in readers a sense of the narrative form as an object in itself. This critical approach effectively obscures the role of the reader in perceiving and engaging with the novel’s sentimentalism, which is regarded as living an independent life of its own within the text. Clearly, however, the entire fictional world, as well as its aesthetic of emotional effects, abides in a tension-filled relationship between our experience of the fictional world and its mere representation as text. This dynamic constitutes the focus of my discussion of *Mason & Dixon’s* sentimental features throughout this thesis.

Bell endorses nineteenth-century realism as the most successful technique for involving readers authentically in a sentimental discourse, which seems in part at least to hinge on his perception that in this context readers experience a harmonious balance between heart and mind, between emotion and reflection, between the sentiment of sensibility and the sentiment of the cerebrum. This underlying dualism within the conceptual field signified by the word sentiment is tied in with the eighteenth-century philosophico-literary ideology of sentimentalism, which believed that a rational and just social order could be predicated on the spontaneous emotions celebrated by the doctrine. This dualism is still with us today, in the seemingly opposed senses of sentiment as either an attitude or a feeling, the former implying intellectual reflection, the latter emotive response. Such a

dichotomy is clearly problematic in the context of today's epistemology, an instability shown up by the term itself, in that our sentiments of mind, which we might be tempted to define as opinions, remain in fact distinguished from opinions due to a certain murkiness surrounding their provenance. Our sentiments, rather, inform our opinions, are rationalised and codified by them; in becoming opinions, our sentiments are dragged out of the mire of sentience, of knowledge or intuitions grounded in sense, and into the protected realm of language, of ideology inscribed by the word. Sentiments, that is, even as we conceive of them as a state of mind, remain at the mercy of our senses, of our feelings, of our pre-rational state. They are imbued with an organic attachment to the earth, which threatens constantly to expose their contingency, their ineffable grounding in the visceral and sensual, despite the niche they pretend to, ensconced in reason and reflection.

These problems are manifest just below the surface of Bell's discussion, or in fact any other that explores the boundaries between text-internal sentiment and the cognitive act of reading. Where does one end and the other begin? Reading, a process of almost absolute abstraction, seems entirely an intellectual exercise; imaginative engagement with the worlds of fiction, on the other hand, requires a suspension of our conscious awareness of the reading act and an emotional, unreflective, investment in those worlds. While critical practice is predicated on moving, unencumbered, between, as it were, the words-as-written and the words-as-read, reading practice (in the novel) strives towards an absolute elimination of the distinction. This is because, as Mikhael Bakhtin has so persuasively argued, novelistic discourse is characterised by voice, or style, whereby the world-view of a particular utterance is embodied *within* the utterance itself, inhering in its language in the first instance, rather than in what it denotatively signifies, this latter being refracted by, and made meaningful because of the former.<sup>3</sup> What we traditionally, and ingenuously, like to regard as the world of the novel – its

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<sup>3</sup> "Discourse in the Novel." Bakhtin 259-422.

characters, its places, its attitudes, its progress through fictional time – is imagined only through, in relation to, and in terms of, the subjective stances we engage with as these are figured in the stylistics of the narrative's discourse, meaning that our sense of fiction's significance is mediated by the nature of our encounter with its representation.

Sentiment, even in the sense of its being an attitude or opinion (that is, seemingly grounded in reason rather than emotion), remains, nonetheless, beyond the pale of "pure" critical reflection. It is at best only partially accessible, and susceptible, to linguistically-mediated consciousness. Our sentiments in this case may be *guided* or *informed* by, say, logic (one may claim), but they are not *led* or *decided* in this way. The passive construction here is also telling: I do not, that is, actively *guide* or *inform* my sentiments, much less *lead* or *decide* them, by reasoned consideration. However much they may seem a matter of mind, sentiments remain an elusive shadow to the ego, and to the extent that they may be manipulated or influenced, it is unclear precisely what agency (if any) controls that project. These sentiments, buried to their necks in the murky unknowns of the psyche, yet announcing themselves clearly in the ether of consciousness, are to us a disturbing pointer to the precariousness and contingency of all we claim as our own. However guided or informed we consider our sentiments to be, nonetheless *we* follow *them*; it is *us* who are led *by them*.

Thus, it is no great leap from the idea of sentiment as a deep-set attitude of ambiguous provenance and uncertain accessibility, to the idea of it as, simply, a feeling or emotion, these latter being the senses more appropriate to consider in a literary context, as well as being the senses more implicated in the pejorative use of the term. Indeed, the word is saturated, from top to bottom as it were, with suggestions of the unreflective and the emotionally intuitive.<sup>4</sup> The kind of "inauthentic" emotionalism derided by the anti-

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<sup>4</sup> This saturation, indeed, is in evidence if we examine the various definitions of sentiment in the OED. The earliest relevant senses of the word, now obscure, date back to the fourteenth century and either privilege the elements of feeling and subjectivity or admit of an

sentimentalist point of view is disparagingly regarded because it is seen as unreflective. The pejorative use of the term sentimental seems to apply where the subject fails themselves to be moved by what aims to be, and might be perceived by others as being, a successful appeal to the emotions. This subject, therefore, considers there to be good reason for the failure, and such reasons are potentially manifold. There may be, for example, a moral contradiction inherent in the sentimental appeal; the situational context may seem unconvincing or manipulated; the sentimental rhetoric may be deemed vulgar or clichéd; or the sentiment may be seen as contrived towards the fulfilment of an ulterior aim. This list is merely partial, of course, and I have intentionally presented it so as not to restrict it to a literary context: these opinions could all well be referring to a literary work but might equally be

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unproblematic involvement of these within the context of sentiments as intellectual phenomena. These definitions are: 1. "Personal experience, one's own feeling"; 2. "Sensation, physical feeling. In later use, a knowledge due to a vague sensation"; 4. "Intellectual or emotional perception." Of the later senses of the word, that which most implicates the intellectual faculties remains, nonetheless, clouded by an infiltration of the subjective. Definition 6. a. is: "What one feels with regard to something; mental attitude (of approval or disapproval, etc); an opinion or view as to what is right or agreeable." Of the three senses listed here the first is corrupted by the idea of sentiment as a *feeling*, while the second and the third reveal the subjective element in respect to the reach or scope of sentiments: they refer not, say, to such reflective and stable intellectual positions as *beliefs* or *convictions* but to reactive positions such as "approval or disapproval" or emotional feelings regarding "what is right or agreeable." Definition 6. b. reveals a stronger element of intellectual consideration: "In a wider sense: An opinion, view (e.g. on a question of fact or scientific truth)." However, this definition is obscure and it is difficult to imagine a scientist today being willing to describe their considered position in a scientific controversy as a *sentiment* in the manner of the examples offered by the OED: even *beliefs* are anathema to rationalist discourse; *sentiments* are grossly inappropriate.

Further definitions tend to emphasise the uneasy interrelations between intellect and emotion in regard to sentiments, and the general subordination of the former to the latter, especially in respect to the literary senses of the word: "7. a. A mental feeling, an emotion. Now chiefly applied, and by psychologists sometimes restricted, to those feelings which involve an intellectual element or are concerned with ideal objects. In the 17-18<sup>th</sup> c. often *spec.* an amatory feeling or inclination.... b. *Phrenology*. In *plural*, used as the name for the class of 'faculties' (including Veneration, Self-esteem, Benevolence, Wonder, etc.), which are concerned with emotion, and to which 'organs' are assigned at the top of the brain.... 8. a. A thought or reflection coloured by or proceeding from emotion.... b. *esp.* An emotional thought expressed in literature or art; the feeling or meaning intended to be conveyed by a passage, as distinguished from the mode of expression.... 9. In generalized use. a. Refined and tender emotion; exercise or manifestation of 'sensibility'; emotional reflection or mediation; appeal to the tender emotions in literature or art. Now chiefly in derisive use, conveying an imputation of either insincerity or mawkishness.... b. Emotional regard to ideal considerations, as a principle of action or judgement."

voiced in the context of any discourse that is labelled, pejoratively, “sentimental.” Whether there is, indeed, a causal relationship between these qualities and the subject’s indifference to the sentiment under discussion is inconsequential. Indeed, it seems likely that one may be in fact moved emotionally, by a tear-jerker film for example, only to dismiss the film, after the event so to speak, as “sentimental” for one or more of the above reasons.<sup>5</sup> What *is* of consequence, though, is that the pejorative reference implies that the sentiment in itself, or those who are moved by it, have failed to reflect sufficiently to perceive the moral, verbal or logical flaws that debase it. This perceived unreflectiveness, this failure to reason, to “think it through,” is the abiding basis for the anti-sentimentalist viewpoint and is the essential bias within the pejorative use of “sentimental,” a use that continues today to hold sway over the various semantic senses of the word.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Sentimental: Mindless Pleasures**

Added to this moral anti-sentimentalism, which might be characterised as rationalist utilitarianism, there exists a more generalised unease about the sentimental, which, while related to the above, encompasses a broader, and more elusive, conception of the term that relates variously to both its contemporary and historical usages. While the anti-sentimentalist viewpoint arose initially in opposition to the perceived bad faith that surrounded both the text-internal sentiment, and readers’ sentimental involvement with this, in the lachrymose histrionics of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novel, the adherents to this literary movement, backed by the humanist philosophies of the time, saw a clear, almost metaphysical, value in the sentimentalist project, which transcended the moral awkwardness posed by

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<sup>5</sup> I, at least, have been guilty of this particular brand of inauthenticity, and Robyn Warhol (2003) has written suggestively on this phenomenon: I will return to her discussion later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> OED definitions of “sentimental” include a reference to the sentimental “Arising from or [being] determined by feeling rather than by reason.” Further, the first definition of “sentimentalism” refers to “the disposition to attribute undue importance to sentimental considerations, or to be governed by sentiment in opposition to reason; the tendency to excessive indulgence in or insincere display of sentiment.”

isolated cases of emotional hyperbole, ethical ineffectuality or underlying fallacies within a supposedly exemplary depiction of human reality. This idealism is bound up in the manifestations of sympathy that we find in fiction and the image they engender of a harmonious society based on sincere fellow-feeling. The image of the Shandy household, as John Mullen (1988) has observed, provides us with one telling example amongst many.<sup>7</sup> The characters of Walter, Uncle Toby and Trim could hardly be more antithetical, yet, despite Walter's exasperation, Toby's constant recourse to whistling Lillabullero, and Trim's voluble impetuosity, Tristram is most eager to impress upon us the fundamental mutual regard between the men, which, in "the 'felicity' of contrast, of comprehensible difference,"<sup>8</sup> harmonises their relations due to their willingness to abandon what is most important to their respective identities. Walter can surely only tolerate the constant verbal intrusions of Trim out of respect for Toby's affection for the man; and he is heroically reconciled to his hobby-horsical pronouncements falling on deaf brotherly ears. Likewise, Trim, one of literature's most forthright creatures, allows himself to speak candidly to the unworldly Toby only once in the novel (and the sensitive reader is spared the content of his speech); and Toby will only agree and agree and agree with the constant prattle of both men. These broadly sympathetic acts are meaningful to the extent that the men effectively give themselves up, abandon their egos, in the name of sentimental relations. Indeed, Toby's near-egoless state is the condition for his status as the sentimental figure *par excellence*. However, outside the comic realm of Sterne's fiction, moral opprobrium is brought to bear on this kind of literary sentimentalism, not because it is inauthentic necessarily, but because it is complacent and unknowing.

This view is articulated in George Meredith's first novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, by Feverel's father, Sir Austen, in his book of (largely) misogynistic aphorisms, "The Pilgrim's Scrip": "Sentimentalists are they who

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<sup>7</sup> Mullen 160-71.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* 163.

seek to enjoy Reality without incurring the Immense Debtorship for a thing done.”<sup>9</sup> Sir Austen is a sentimentalist himself, as the narrator makes clear on the page following this quotation, and his own lack of self-knowledge, his jaded sentiments (he was deserted by his wife) and the sentimental blindness that accompanies his anti-sentimentalist designs, all result in his becoming the unknowing villain of this ultimately bleak novel. That said, however, in the early stages of the narrative readers take a sympathetic attitude to Sir Austen, and “The Pilgrim’s Scrip” acts, in part at least, as a mouthpiece for Meredith, himself an avowed anti-sentimentalist.<sup>10</sup> This particular excerpt has enjoyed a lasting literary career, with Oscar Wilde, in *De Profundis* (1905), telling Bosie that “you were, and are I suppose still, a typical sentimentalist. For a sentimentalist is simply one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.”<sup>11</sup> Later, Joyce has Stephen Dedalus quote it, in his telegram to Buck Mulligan, as “[t]he sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done.” In this latter case, Stephen is referring to Haines, the Hiberno-phile Englishman, with whom Mulligan is friendly, this relationship disturbing Stephen throughout the early chapters and providing the basis for his decision to cut ties with Mulligan. The association is brought home when, later, during the “Oxen of the Sun” episode, the line is again quoted immediately after Haines’s brief appearance on the scene.<sup>12</sup> The implication from Stephen’s point of view is clear and needs little elaboration: Haines’s interest in Ireland is offensive and ridiculous in that he lacks the insider’s knowledge of what it means to be the colonised. This is resonant, because it brings home to us the extent to which so many of our society’s pleasures, over and above novel-reading, can be regarded as sentimentalist: cultural performances; spectator sports; tourism;

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<sup>9</sup> Meredith, *Feverel* 214.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, what E. M. Forster observed about Meredith reflects Meredith’s own portrayal of Sir Austen: “His heavy attacks on sentimentality – they bore the present generation, which pursues the same quarry but with neater instruments, and is apt to suspect any one carrying a blunderbuss of being a sentimentalist himself.” Forster 97.

<sup>11</sup> Wilde 636.

<sup>12</sup> Joyce 255, 539.



popular science; travel writing; and a host of other distractions of information made meaningless by our fundamental ignorance of its original context, a context that we sentimentally idealise without conceiving of the sheer unreality of this idealisation.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the whole of our mediated postmodern culture, specular, vicarious and historico-contextually deprived, might be regarded in this sense as sentimental.

While it might seem that characterising tourism, for example, as sentimentalist is drawing a rather long bow, there is a certain compelling logic to Meredith's statement, which directs us to a way of conceiving of both the social institutions mentioned above and, more emphatically, the modern novel as a sentimental form in a manner that accounts for these various elements and the biases they refer to in our understanding of what the sentimental means. My intention is not to side with any one of the points of view under discussion but rather to elucidate a position based on an awareness of what is signified in the resonances that these points of view evoke, being particularly aware of the potential fruitfulness in considering the significance of the seeming disharmony represented by the widespread contempt for the sentimental that co-exists with an arguable saturation of sentimental discourse within society. Firstly, however, it is useful to consider briefly the ways in which aspects of sentiment are regarded in social discourse today and to relate these to the historical ideas I have discussed.

I have already examined the idea of sentiments as attitudes or opinions, suggesting that even in this sense the element of intellectual reflection is clouded by emotional or intuitive feelings. I have further elaborated on the senses in which the sentimental is viewed disparagingly, and clearly these anti-sentimentalist attitudes remain widespread in the current social and intellectual climate. In addition to these aspects of

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<sup>13</sup> Another OED definition of sentimental refers to persons "[a]ddicted to indulgence in superficial emotion" and the definition of sentimentalist is: "One who cultivates or affects sentimentality; one who holds sentimental doctrines." I have been discussing ideas associated with these definitions, particularly in respect to affectation, indulgence and superficial emotion, this latter term especially pointing to the far more generalised complaint expressed by Meredith, Wilde and Joyce.

sentiment, however, there are the senses in which the term is used in reference to its emotional implications without involving the suggestion of a strong moral judgement. As I have suggested, an important element of the sentimentalist ideology that is associated with the “cult of feeling” is the relinquishment of the demands of the ego in favour of sympathetic relations with others. This implies a certain uncompensated “giving up” of the self, an abandonment of selfishness in favour of selflessness. The impetus towards this action, further, is regarded as unreflective and spontaneous; it is a sentimental state of mind that engenders intuitively a sympathetic identification with others. This historical ideology is reflected in the notion, which remains current, of our sentiments being engaged by another. When this occurs, there is an accompanying sense of exhilaration as our personal baggage is emptied out and we invest ourselves wholly in this other. (This phenomenon is no doubt promoted by our culture’s sentimental notions of romantic love, although of course our sentiments might be engaged in this way not just by a lover but by one’s child, a student, a stranger even, or possibly an animal or inanimate object – although these latter would almost certainly be anthropomorphised through a metonymic or synecdochical ascription to them of human qualities or identities.) At the same time, however, this sentimental engagement with another brings with it the insecurity and anxiety of knowing that, in giving ourselves as we do, we equally abandon our capacity for discretionary judgement in relation to that other. Sentiments in this sense are regarded as a wholesale, and pleasurable, loss of objectivity, a drive towards a fantasy of selflessness in the idealisation of the other.

While eighteenth-century sentimentalist philosophy saw profundity and the possibility for social change in the imaginative abandonment of the objective self, today’s society sees it as a more or less meaningless aberration of unreality, at best indulgent, at worst potentially harmful. Our sentiments may become engaged in this way, and we may enjoy the pleasure, anxiety or pain that accompanies this, but we feel compelled also to acknowledge that

we are involved in a kind of fantasy of idealisation. The same is true in terms of cultural products that we might describe, non-pejoratively, as sentimental. To say, for example, that one loves sentimental music, or sentimental movies, is a profoundly loaded statement. Firstly, it is not ironic, so it does not involve an implicit rejection or disparagement of these sentimental products. Nonetheless, despite the good faith of the statement, it does involve an implicit acknowledgment that the preference is neither reasonable nor reasoned, and that the sentimental content being enjoyed, and the emotions it inspires, are not significant beyond the pleasure they give. The statement is not an aesthetic or moral judgement, but is rather an admission of the subject's knowing suspension of critical reflection in the indulgence of an insignificant and untenable emotion. I will come back to these ideas in my discussion of film as a contemporary sentimental form later in this chapter, but first I would like to relate this discussion of sentiment and the sentimental to my conception of the modern novel as a sentimental form beyond merely the scope of eighteenth-century sentimentalism and later examples of the novel that involve overtly sentimental passages.

### **The Novel: A Sentimental Form**

Chapter thirty-five of *Mason & Dixon* begins with a debate in the LeSpark household over the reliability of recorded histories in their attempts to represent the truth. Ethelmer, embodying the voice of modernist scepticism and post-modernist frivolity, suggests, attempting to lighten the mood: "Then, let us have only Jolly Theatrickals about the Past, and be done with it, — 'twould certainly lighten my School-work." His eccentric aunt, Euphrenia, replies: "Or read Novels," with, the narrator tells us, a "tone of dismissal owing more to her obligations as a Guest than her real Sentiments, engag'd more often than she might admit, with examples of the Fabulist's Art." To this her brother-in-law, Ives, reacts with alarm, making a speech against novel-reading for the benefit of his young niece, Tenebræ:

As if having just detected a threat to the moral safety of the company, Ives announces, “I cannot, damme I cannot I say, energetically enough insist upon the danger of reading these storybooks, — in particular those known as ‘Novel.’ Let she who hears, heed. Britain’s Bedlam even as the French Salpêtrière being populated by an alarming number of young persons, most of them female, seduced across the sill of madness by these irresponsible narratives, that will not distinguish between fact and fancy. How are those frail Minds to judge? Alas, every reader of ‘Novel’ must be reckoned a soul in peril, — for she hath made a D — — I’s bargain, squandering her most precious time, for nothing in return but the meanest and shabbiest kinds of mental excitement. ‘Romance,’ pernicious enough in its day, seems in Comparison wholesome.” (350-1)

In this representation of novel-reading, Euphrenia as a reader has her *sentiments engaged* in the fiction, an act which the puritanical Ives sees as offering only “the meanest and shabbiest kinds of mental excitement” and the danger of her being “seduced across the sill of madness” due to her emotional involvement in an unreal world. Thomas Pynchon’s rendering of a fictional historical scene cannot, clearly, be regarded as historical evidence of anything, but the resonance of the passage for readers today alerts us to an understanding we have of what the novel is and how it might be viewed.

While novel-reading is a commonplace activity today, and does not, evidently, lead to madness, it is easy to imagine that the power of the form, in allowing for an individual’s private absorption in an imagined, fictitious and entirely abstract world, would be regarded as psychologically and socially dangerous by an individual such as Ives. Romance is less threatening because its content does not pretend to realism and its plots and morals are predictable and formulaic. Poetry is an aesthetic, rather than escapist, form. Drama, whether tragedy, comedy or history, is overtly performative, communal and enshrining of shared conceptions of reality. And epic is driven, not by plot and character, but by the reiteration of recognised events that in themselves are culturally meaningful.<sup>14</sup> These literary forms, in other words, offer an element of ritual in their performance and reception. The modern novel, by contrast, draws its readers into a fictional world intended to mirror reality, and the significance or meaning found there is constructed in

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<sup>14</sup> These ideas are articulated by Bakhtin in “Epic and Novel,” Bakhtin 3-40.

terms of the mundane vicissitudes of a mythically inconsequential life being granted an artificial intensity through contrived plots and selective focussing on specific events, moments and points of view. When the reader gives themselves up to this fictional world they cast themselves off from social reality and become absorbed in a solitary imaginative fantasy of no clear cultural, religious or aesthetic significance. This abandonment of themselves and their society renders them, in Ives' view, "a soul in peril."

The history of the novel through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries evinces an anxiety in respect to sentimental themes, which reflects a generalised antagonism towards sentimentalism alongside an implicit awareness of its centrality to the genre itself. This is in evidence in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, which plays out on many levels the problems of sentiment in respect to the form of the novel. In his introduction to *The Egoist*, Meredith writes that comedy "watches over sentimentalism with a birch rod,"<sup>15</sup> yet it is not with humour, but rather horror, that he ultimately attacks sentimentalism in his first novel, which is, despite this, at times a very humorous narrative. As I have said, Meredith complicates the anti-sentimentalist position by revealing his arch-antisentimentalist, Sir Austen, as in fact blinded by sentiment; and, further to this, Sir Austen's star accomplices, his nephew Adrian, a witty, self-proclaimed sentimentalist, and his sister, Doria Forey, can only be regarded in the long view as heartless, conniving, cruel and entirely self-interested. While Meredith was discomfited by sentimental excess, he was equally not inclined towards cynical celebrations of neo-Hobbesian contempt for the idea of humanity, and in the character of Adrian he implies a common ground between these positions.

The narrator's self-conscious irony in this novel is directed to some extent towards exposing sentimentalist elements in all its characters and revealing this sentimentalism, in all but the complacently cynical Adrian, as the site of their blindness and unknowing inhumanity. The extent of this irony

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<sup>15</sup> Meredith, *Egoist* 36.

is felt in the narrator's comment in respect to Sir Austen's entries in "The Pilgrim's Scrip" relating to sentimentalism: "However, one who could set down the dying for love, as a sentimentalism, can hardly be accepted as a clear authority." This resonates throughout because, indeed, the sentimentalist trope of dying for love is invoked twice in the novel, in both cases with Richard as the object of the love, but in neither case is it affirming or redemptive, and its function in the history of the novelistic tradition is brought into question. The first to die in this way is Richard's cousin, Clare, after being coerced by Doria Forey, her mother, into a loveless marriage for the sake of money. Despite various characters' protestations of Clare's innocence and purity, her death uncovers a disquietingly human element to her character, and she is revealed, in her repression, as disturbed from a young age by sexual self-awareness. Later, the death of Richard's true love, Lucy, when she believes Richard to be dying of a wound that is the culmination of events precipitated by Sir Austen's stubborn pride, is shocking in its meaninglessness and bathos. That readers experience this death as an unnecessary and hollow destruction, rather than as sentimentally pathetic, nonetheless illustrates their sentimental attachment to the character and the love story of which she is a critical part. Indeed, what happens here is a confrontation between two sentimentalist narratives, that of virtue rewarded *à la* Pamela (as with this latter, Lucy is of a lower class than Richard and the match is disapproved of by his family), and virtue that is "too good for this world" *à la* Clarissa. This confrontation results in both narratives being belied by their mutual incompatibility, signified by the bleak dissatisfaction readers experience at Lucy's death, dissatisfaction that points all the while to their sentimental engagement with the narrative and its sympathetic characters.

The kind of narrating ambivalence found in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* reflects a general movement in the history of the novel, anticipated in English by Fielding and particularly Sterne, whereby the act of narration becomes the focus in the novelistic production of meaning—in terms of both artistic value and thematic content. The ability of the narrating position to

represent perspective and subjectivity allows for greater complexity in readers' engagement with, and understanding of, character, and the management of this shifting representation is the critical condition for, simultaneously, the novel's ability to render the image of a meaningful fictional world and this rendering to be imbued with an aesthetic quality. While it might be argued that beauty in a novel inheres in its evocative and poetic use of language, this remains subordinate to the necessity that such language is in the first instance attentive to creating a dialogic image of human subjectivity in respect to the inextinguishable narrative demand for the representation of event.<sup>16</sup> While for Fielding and Sterne a reflexive narrating position is merely an ironic undermining of affective verisimilitude, by the nineteenth century a writer such as Jane Austen found a self-consciously positioned narrating perspective critical to the creation of a drama of social attitudes, cultural ideologies and economic imperatives – the foundations of the realist novel. Meanwhile, this general narrative impetus towards relativity reflected and articulated an equally ambivalent attitude towards sentimentalism and its wholesale commitment to a single subjective position. The sympathetic balance Austen strikes between the sense of Eleanor Dashwood and the sensibility of her sister Marianne, for example, is achieved through the ironic distance of her narrator from each character and the ability of that narrator to refract through her own voice the competing ideologies of her society.

Of course, in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen also made the expedient move of having Marianne recover, rather than die, from the infection that grips her towards the end of the novel. In this respect it is clear that the narrating

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<sup>16</sup> This is articulated in Henry James's rejection of the "old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident": "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is *not* of character?" James 392.

Bakhtin puts it this way: "No artistic genre can organize itself around suspense alone, for the very good reason that to be suspenseful there must be matters of suspense to engage. And only a human life, or at least something directly touching it, is capable of evoking such suspense. This human factor must be revealed in some substantial aspect, however slight; that is, it must possess some degree of living *reality*." Bakhtin 107.

position of a novel, and the attitude towards emotionally wrought content that this position bespeaks, also lays down the possibilities for how the plot will play out. The modernist novel inherited the nineteenth century's innovations in narrative and further refined them to the extent of embarking on an asymptotic reaching towards the creation of the novel as a genre defined exclusively by the form of its narration rather than by what it narrates. An important step in this direction was the attempt to eliminate, as much as was possible, the overtly dramatic or affecting from the novel's plot and to institute an emphasis on the increasingly mundane. To the extent that modernist novels do involve themselves with death, love, distressed virtue or other emotionally evocative topics, these are treated either through a perspective of disinterest, madness or irony, or they are sublimated by way of an attention to their aesthetic rendering rather than affective qualities.

This brings into play the elitist assumptions surrounding the modernist project, addressed by Suzanne Clark in *Sentimental Modernism* (1991), which stabilises itself by simply jettisoning from its ranks those works that do not conform to its ironic and aesthetic agenda.<sup>17</sup> The modernist novel defines itself in terms of its antagonism towards overt sentimentalism, requiring that the reader's engagement with characters and their lives be debarred from becoming emotional by acts of narrative innovation that aestheticise the act of narration, relativise the potentially affective content, or simply remove such content from focus. As I have said, in this way the word sentimental becomes unquestionably pejorative, referring not to the underlying necessity that readers do engage with fictional characters but only to those instances where modernist autonomy is threatened by an invasion of feeling that points unambiguously to that necessity. Hence, M. H. Abrams writes in his highly influential undergraduate text, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, that

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<sup>17</sup> Clark's introduction, "The Unwarranted Discourse," [Clark 1-16] provides a compelling analysis of the modernist repulsion of the sentimental. While her focus is on the gendered nature of the sentimental in the modernist context, as is Warhol's, my approach is more specific to the formal elements of sentimental narrative. Michael Bell also tackles the lacunae of the modernist anti-sentimentalist position in "Modernism and the Attack on Sentiment." Bell, *Sentimentalism* 160-9.



[a] useful distinction between sentimental and nonsentimental is one which does not depend on the intensity or type of the feeling expressed or evoked, but labels as sentimental a work or passage in which the feeling is rendered in commonplaces and *clichés*, instead of being freshly verbalized and sharply realized in the details of the representation.<sup>18</sup>

Where the feeling is “freshly verbalized and sharply realized in the details of the representation,” that feeling is not sentimental (or is “nonsentimental”); what it in fact *is*, though, Abrams declines to tell us.

Abrams’ view here is that “sentimental” is a necessarily pejorative term, referring to artistically moribund, emotionally charged writing. This represents an attempt to transfer the weight of the sentimentalist infraction onto the quality of the writing rather than onto the sentimental content, obfuscating the generally dubious status such content has in the modernist context. What Abrams inadvertently points to, in fact, is the modernist desire to aestheticise and problematise not exclusively elements of affect but, indeed, the entire novelistic process of engagement with character and the way this process confers meaning on the necessary unfolding of plot. In this respect, affective scenes are not required as a test of the success of readers’ engagement because this no longer seems the point. Rather, mundanity of plot and feeling, as in *Ulysses*, becomes the test of the narrative’s ability to create meaning solely through the linguistically mediated creation of the image of character. To the extent that readers’ sympathy is brought into play by the eliciting of an emotional response, this response needs to be made complex by the specific subjective position of the character in question.<sup>19</sup> The sentimental “universals” of love, death and virtue are too simplistic in this view, and a greater artistic challenge is involved in arousing readers’ sympathy towards flawed and destructive characters such as Joe Christmas and Dmitry Karamazov. The narrative processes involved in engaging readers with characters such as Bloom, Christmas and Karamazov remain

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<sup>18</sup> Abrams 171.

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to consider in this context the sentimental feelings that *Ulysses* fans tend to have towards Bloom – not in terms of the reading process but in their conception of his reality after the fact of reading.

essentially sentimental in that they allow for our subjective abandonment of ourselves in favour of these characters, but the complexity of the realism involved, the machinations of the plot, the narrating perspective and the characters' attitudes themselves tend to debar invasions of overtly tender feelings which would bring to light the sentimental engagement in which we are involved.<sup>20</sup>

Overt sentimentalism needs to be abolished from the modernist novel because it threatens to detract from the modernist project by shifting the focus from the artistry of the narrative representation to that which is represented, which undermines the attempt to privilege formal processes over dramatic content. While our emotional involvement remains complicated by relativity, perspective and competing responses, this ambivalence reflects on the success of the narrative in its rendering of a version of reality that does not rely on simplistic moralising and wholesale abandonment to a single subjective point of view. The reader's sentimental engagement in this context is nuanced by the pervading relativism and malleable perspectives represented by the host of narrative features and techniques that define the aesthetic sophistication of novelistic narrative in the modernist context. In other words, the sentimentalist project that involves readers in a sympathetic relationship with a fictional subject is here sublimated by its apparent re-creation as an art form in itself, with the aesthetic component built into the complexity of the representation of human existence and the rendering of that complexity in a manner that seems meaningful and profound. Overt sentimentalism is at odds with this project in two respects, one acknowledged and one kept at bay by the virulence of anti-sentimentalist rhetoric. In the first instance, the simplicity of the sentimental response sits ill with a form, and a contemporary culture, that is attentive to a pervasive relativity that encompasses morality, ethics, identity and humanist dogma. In this respect, existential dilemmas,

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<sup>20</sup> For example, in the case of Christmas, his death is defiant, and we share that defiance, while the potentially sentimental scene just prior to his escape, when he is reunited with his grandmother, takes place "off screen."

moral vacillations, alienation, detachment and defiance would be deemed states of mind more profound and resonant than sympathy, generosity and pity. In the second instance, though, overt sentimentalism is unwelcome in this context because it draws attention to the sentimental engagement that underscores these hard-nosed modernist evocations of the realities of secular existence. By forbidding overt sentimentality from the genre, the modernist novel effectively truncates the continuum of sentimental engagement at the neck, at the point where it most dramatically draws attention to itself, and is thereby able to deny the essentially sentimental imperative that is built into an art form that constructs meaningful narratives around the revelation of otherwise meaningless characters.

### **The Voice of Modernism**

This modernist complication of character and perspective has been achieved primarily through a studied, evolving interrogation of the signifying potential of the narrating voice. This is because this voice provides the essential conduit into the subjectivities of characters, so as the primary site of revelation it is the obvious starting point for a project that seeks to render artistically the subjective vicissitudes of lived experience. As I have suggested, this process began at the earliest stages of the novel's development, with Fielding and Sterne providing invigorating counter-examples to the simplicity of Richardson's narrator as, at best, merely a typesetter and transcriber, editing and ordering characters' revelatory epistles. In the nineteenth century, Austen, Dickens, Melville (particularly in *Moby Dick*) and Hawthorne each contributed to the growing sophistication and possibilities of the narrating figure and the relationships they carve out in their critical role as mediator between readers and characters. In the modernist period, this tradition was seized upon by the current avatars of the impulse towards narrative innovation, notably of course Joyce, but also Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence and William Faulkner. In *Ulysses*, Joyce laid down in bare and uncompromising form the conceivable scope of narrating style and the

challenge for future narrative in the novel. By making the act of narration the central aesthetic and intellectual locus for his novel's accretion of meaningfulness, Joyce put narration itself at the centre of our culture's conception of what and how the novel, as a genre, means.

The humanist tensions this move involves may be illustrated by reference to *Jealousy* (1957), a much discussed novel by French avant-garde writer, Alain Robbe-Grillet. Robbe-Grillet's work in general represents a quite remarkable attempt to push narrative in the novel to the absolute limit of meaningfulness. His overriding design is to disrupt from the inside the processes that traditionally give coherence to narrative: sequence, identity, perspective and reliability. This design gives the reader the sense of constantly approaching, while never reaching, narrative chaos. The final impression of Robbe-Grillet as a novelist, then, is as a master rather than destroyer of the form. In *Jealousy*, Robbe-Grillet writes a novel from the point of view of a central character who never himself appears. He is the husband of a woman who may possibly be having an affair with their gregarious neighbour. The husband *is* in every scene, but because the narrative, a film-like description of physical events, comes directly from his viewpoint, he is never, as it were, in shot. He does not speak, but the narration coolly describes, without analysis, what he sees. In this novel, Robbe-Grillet draws our attention to the potential narrative has for arousing readers' sympathetic identification without it even needing an identifiable object: the husband is never referred to in any way, and his presence, the fundamental presence, the moral centre, of the novel, is merely inferred. A telling phenomenon in this respect is the common description of the husband *as* the narrator of the novel. So powerful is his presence (in absence) that readers seem compelled to furnish him with a meaningful identity within the traditional scope of literary analysis. Indeed, American critic Seymour Chatman makes just this blunder in the course of a work in which he also discusses approvingly the relevant

distinction, as made by Gérard Genette, between “who speaks” and “who sees.”<sup>21</sup>

A related, though quite distinct, point can be made in regard to novels in which character is diminished in the face of narrating irony. The novels of another French writer, Raymond Queneau,<sup>22</sup> provide an example, as does *A Nest of Ninnies* (1969) by John Ashbery and James Schuyler. In these works, characters seem utterly bereft of any emotional drive that readers can sympathise with. They are not caricatures so much as human automata, living recognisable but ethically vacuous lives. In these novels, readers’ engagement is focused almost exclusively on the ironic narrating perspective, with how and what it chooses to depict of the characters and the judgement this depiction implies. It is with this inferred narrative point of view that readers identify and through this imaginative act of identification that they take pleasure in the works. Ironic narration adds a further moral dimension to a novel, a perspective and attitude, which has the ability to engage readers with an imagined human agency that is present, not as a character, but as a voice. Whether it is found in the “truth universally acknowledged” of Austen’s narrator, or in the high (post)modernism of Queneau’s or Ashbery and Schuyler’s, irony signifies, and this signification rests on readers’ interest in, identification and sympathy with, the perspective it represents.

The world of the modernist novel is a world of voices and perspectives, which interact, cross-over, substantiate or undermine each other. The demand on the reader seeking to become involved in this world is that they engage competently with these voices and perspectives, although such engagement is by no means a simple, uncomplicated affair. Indeed, it is complex in the scientific sense, involving interrelations and associations more elaborate and varied than can be thoroughly represented in denotative language. This is the

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<sup>21</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse* 57. Admittedly, Genette equivocates on the same question, suggesting that the novel *can* be read either “in the objectivist mode with no jealous person in the narrating, or purely as the interior monologue of a husband spying on his wife.” Genette, *ND* 219, note 17. I find the latter possibility unconvincing, but, either way, the ambiguity remains telling.

<sup>22</sup> For example, *The Sunday of Life* (1951).

modernist contribution to the novel: by making aesthetically complex the essentially sentimental procedures of narrative sympathy, the genre has developed as a vibrant artistic form. At the same time, though, this modernist aesthetic has given no place to overt sentimentalism, effectively denying the novel's capacity for immediate emotional impact. Literature that has attempted such impact has been dismissed as "sentimental," a by-word for unsophisticated, trite and tasteless.

Indeed, while the narrative manoeuvres of the modernist novel situate readers' emotional involvement with characters on a continuum of intimacy/estrangement that refers unwillingly to the prospect of sentimentalism, the aesthetic of the novel, which I have been discussing, orients itself around a denial of this continuum. To rephrase Wilde, the modernist dislike of sentimentalism is the rage of Joyce seeing Richardson's face in a glass. In other words, the narrative aesthetic of the modernist novel gains its primary moral and stylistic impetus by way of an attempt to jettison the formal sentimentalism that is integral to the novel's meaning as a genre. This sublimation involves constructing as other those novels that exist closer to the intimacy end of the continuum, novels in which readers' immediate emotional involvement with character is invited and encouraged. Such novels – and *The Corrections* is one – would seem to belong more clearly to a tradition that defined itself in terms of the perceived ethical efficacy involved in a sympathetic attitude to the mundane suffering of any given individual's life. By contrast, self-consciously avant-garde novels define their efficacy in terms of their aestheticising, and aggrandising, of that mundanity through formal innovations that expressly question ethical significance and see sympathy as a threat to artistic autonomy. When E. M. Forster describes *Ulysses* as "a dogged attempt to cover the universe with mud,"<sup>23</sup> he, perhaps inadvertently, gets to the heart of the matter: from the modernist standpoint, for a novel to achieve epic resonance it must eschew an ethical foregrounding

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<sup>23</sup> Forster 125.

of its mundane realism and, *directly by way of the success of that eschewal*, construct itself as significant in terms of its meaningful rendering of an ethically mundane realism.

Albert Camus, for example, is only interested in having his stranger narrate his own story precisely because he is as unaffected by his mother's death, his own capacity to murder, and his impending execution, as we are expected to be. Readers are allowed into the heart and mind of Leopold Bloom but only on an average day of ingestion, excretion, micturition and masturbation, a day of distraction, vague dislocation, half-hearted questing and middle-aged resignation to marital infidelity, not, for example, the day when he lost his son Rudy eleven years earlier. The idea of Joyce writing *that* novel is inconceivable. Lena Grove and Joe Christmas are the moral foci of Faulkner's definitive novel, *Light in August* (1932), yet their efficacy as symbols derives from the reader's estrangement, through narrative distance, from their inner lives, which can only be inferred. The death of Christmas (a Christ figure) is a mythic necessity and so not affecting in anything but an existential sense (as Sartre noted<sup>24</sup>), but it also acts as a dramatic counterpoint to the "virgin" mother Lena's imperturbable and life-affirming continuation of her journey, which, in its comic rendering (recounted by an anonymous figure at the novel's close), preserves her dignity and Faulkner's realism while simultaneously saving the novel from the sentimental inconvenience of having such a powerful character reduced to either a pitiful state or to the sentimental fantasy of domestication offered by Byron Bunch, whose idealism subjects him to an absurd slavishness born of his unremitting yet unrequited love.<sup>25</sup>

The narrative feature that maintains the possibility of readers' sentimental response, even within the modernist antics of alienation, is the manipulation of language to create an illusion of human subjectivity within

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<sup>24</sup> Sartre 405-6.

<sup>25</sup> As Clark observes, "in Faulkner's hands, we are not encouraged to identify with Lena, or to see her overtaking the place of the hero." Clark 188.

novelistic discourse. This is most clearly manifest in the concept of character, but it is also, more interestingly, evident in our idea of “the narrator.” What Genette calls the extra-heterodiegetic narrator, a disembodied, unidentified figure, a figure that is merely implied connotatively by the text, is nonetheless accepted by critical discourse as, in some manner, a literal being, one which has, furthermore, in the course of twentieth-century criticism, managed to usurp the actual author as the privileged subjective agency responsible for the narrative. The apprehension of this precarious subjective agency relies on a logic of manifest identity, an emergent individual haecceity, grounded solely in, and mediated exclusively by, linguistic constructions that create an interplay of voice, perspective, knowledge, attitude and mood, which underscores a cumulative sense of this verbal trace as emanating from a specific “human” source.<sup>26</sup>

As I have implied in my brief discussion of *Jealousy*, this novel provides an illustration of the compulsive power, and complexity, involved in the textual emergence of a subjective narrating presence and the characters it constructs through the creation of linguistic differences. The character of the husband is unambiguously, and meaningfully, inferred by the reader, despite being never referred to and devoid of a voice, because of the narrator’s creation of his possibility in the construction of perspective and implying of memory. That another reader might disagree and identify the husband *as* the narrator is not a sign of unsuccessful writing, but is a testament, in fact, to the novel’s success in creating the illusion of both this male character and a narrating voice that *belongs to someone* – or at least to some sentient, subjective (human) thing – or is its linguistic representative. This novel is exemplary for my purposes because the two figures I perceive, the narrator and the husband, are both unidentified denotatively by the narrative, yet both are nonetheless clearly present to the reader’s imagination. This illustrates in a

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<sup>26</sup> We can note, for example, that our phrase-by-phrase experience of an extra-heterodiegetic narration is not fundamentally different from reading one of Marlow’s accounts, despite the named and strongly sensed identity of the latter narrator.



pared-down fashion the essential work of narrative in the modern novel, where, as I have argued, the creation of meaning in a humanist sense depends on drawing readers into accepting, on an emotional level, the semblances of individual, mundane and mythically vacuous lives that are substantively, as the structuralists remind us, no more than arbitrary patterns on paper.

*Jealousy* compels us to realise, as to a lesser extent do all narratives with an extra-heterodiegetic narrator, that these imagined lives, and their affective capabilities, rely less on their being named and described than on their apprehension, by readers, as significant agents inferred through creative engagement with the interplay of their textual shadows.<sup>27</sup>

My discussion of *Mason & Dixon*'s narrative will concern the radically underdetermined status of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator in this novel, who, because of the formal machinations of his construction, is essentially denied the possibility of a coherent identity in the traditional realist terms of the novel. At the same time, however, this figure retains a haecceity of verbal expression, meaning that the novel's narrative does not collapse into subjective chaos but rather retains a signifying potential that is at once humanist (and thus potentially sentimental) but at the same time represents itself *as* pure representation. As I will show, the radically underdetermined character of this narrator is achieved through its ubiquity across diegetic levels and voices, which is inspired by the movement between diegetic levels on the television or movie screen. This screen aesthetic is fundamental to my conception of this novel, its narration and its sentimentality, and in the remainder of this chapter I will propose a manner of approaching the contemporary sentimental in respect to the sentiment of film, which, as with my later discussion of *Mason & Dixon*, involves a tension between the perceived real and its containment within representation, as this becomes manifest in the dialogues of the diegetic.

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<sup>27</sup> The two clearly distinguishable, yet both anonymous, narrating voices in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* is a good example of this process at work.

## The Tear-Jerker

The phenomenon I alluded to above, whereby a critical subject might be moved emotionally by a sentimental film only to then dismiss the film as “sentimental,” is given a suggestive accent by Robyn Warhol when she acknowledges being brought to tears by the phrase “Courage, Mom” in Barry Levinson’s film, *Wag the Dog* (1997), co-written by Hilary Henkin and David Mamet. This is a profoundly cynical film, which sees Washington spin-doctor, Conrad Brean (Robert De Niro) teaming up with Hollywood producer, Stanley Motss (Dustin Hoffman), to produce “the image of a war” with Albania to distract the American public’s attention from a presidential sex scandal eleven days out from an election. After opposing candidate, Senator John Neal (Craig T. Nelson), tells the American public that “there is no war,” Motss, in conjunction with his ally in public manipulation, the Fad King (Denis Leary), has a brainwave: an American soldier has been captured behind enemy lines and must be brought home. This, for Motss, is even better than the fake war, because “you can’t have a war without a hero.” A psychotic prisoner is found to play the “hero,” Sergeant William Schumann (Woody Harrelson), and a suitably grainy picture is released to the media, along with the intelligence that the rips in his sweater are in fact a message in Morse code: “Courage, Mom.” Like many of the “revelations” in the movie, we the audience (while knowing the entire war narrative to be a fiction) receive this information through the same medium as the American public: we watch the television news item where the Morse code is “interpreted” and, testing Warhol’s observation on myself, I too experienced a physiological reaction (although not quite tears) to the sincere voice of the anchorman intoning several times: “Courage, Mom.” As Warhol notes, “[t]here is nothing authentic, nothing genuine, nothing ‘real’ about the moment, nothing in the diegetic context that could explain my reaction,”<sup>28</sup> recognising that it results from “the mobilization of a familiar narrative formula” that remains affective

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<sup>28</sup> Warhol xvii.

“despite my best efforts (not to mention David Mamet’s) to defuse that formula’s power by analyzing and even ridiculing it.” I contend, however, that Mamet is *not* making an effort to defuse the power of the formula; rather, the effectiveness of the film relies to an extent on this power being manifest to the audience in their own informed yet sentimental response. I want to explore this in respect to two “sincere” films of sentiment, one which Warhol also refers to, Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and another, more recent example, Tim Burton’s *Big Fish* (2003).

In her brief discussion of *Saving Private Ryan*,<sup>29</sup> Warhol narrates the emotional responses of a male “lawyer verging on forty,” who described to her his experience of the film. Warhol notes how the sentimental response that is engendered at the film’s close, when the screen returns to the original, contemporary setting of an old man visiting a military grave, is tied up in the narrative trick whereby Spielberg, in the opening sequence, gives viewers to believe that the old man is Captain Miller (Tom Hanks), who will thus, we believe, survive the war. In the penultimate scene, however, Miller is killed and we realise that the old man is in fact Private Ryan (Matt Damon) hoping that the good life he has tried to lead has compensated for Miller’s sacrifice. Warhol does not mention Miller’s dying words to Ryan before the return to the contemporary setting, but they are worth noting: “Earn this.” As with “Courage, Mom,” the weight of the moral situation inheres in this pithy phrase, which viewers, instantaneously, and Ryan, over fifty years, carry back to the gravesite, a catalyst for the inevitable emotional outpouring – built up in this case over nearly three hours – which for the lawyer is described as a “wave of sensation.”

*Big Fish* is the redemptive story of Will Bloom (Billy Crudup) coming to terms with the fictionalised life-stories that his father, Ed Bloom (Ewan McGregor and Albert Finney), compulsively tells about himself. In the “real time” of the movie, Will returns home with his improbably beautiful wife,

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* xiv-xv.

Josephine (Marion Cotillard), after years of estrangement from his father, to be with him as he is dying of cancer. In the course of the real time of the movie, and during flashbacks to Will's childhood, the older Ed (Finney) tells (for our benefit) the various stories of his younger self (McGregor), stories that Will, we understand, has grown up hearing and, as a boy, believing. Will, a journalist, has a problem with his father's fantastical tales, which goes something like this: he only knows the stories but does not know the real man; his father's stories monopolise history and disrespect the truth; his father (a travelling salesman who was never home much) possibly has something to hide. Hoping to finally get some closure and truth from his father before he dies, Will learns, rather, the value of story-telling and the dignity of Ed's imaginative accounts, a lesson brought home to us at the death scene where Will takes over the story-telling role and creates for his father the story of his death to thus ease the latter's journey into the void. Although Will tells us at the outset that in the story of his father's life "it's impossible to separate the fact from the fiction" and that "that's what kind of story this is," in fact the most sentimental moments of the film, where the acculturated viewer feels the physical sensations Warhol describes (the auguries or even the issuing of tears), occur along moments of rapprochement between "true history" and "fiction," moments where Ed's fantastical stories are reduced to comprehensibility within Will's life-world and the demands of cinematic realism: the witch (Helena Bonham Carter) turns out to be merely the straight-talking divorcee, Jenny; Karl the Giant (Matthew McGrory) turns out to be merely a very tall man; and the town of Sceptre is in fact real, but not quite the idyllic paradise Ed had always described.

Neither the off-putting conservatism and obviousness of *Big Fish*, nor the contrived and manipulated nature of shock at the end of *Saving Private Ryan*, nor the outright cynicism of *Wag the Dog*, completely protect the audience from the invasions of sentiment that these films orchestrate. This at least puts a question mark around the simplicity of the idea of "identification" in explaining our sentimental responses, which seem to issue not so much

from this subjective transmigration, but from a tension created between perceived representation and perceived reality, a tension that plays as much upon our anxieties at the impossibility of subjective transmigration as it does on its postulated reality. The common feature of the sentimental moments in these three completely different films is their issuing along the surfaces between framed (diegetic and metadiegetic) narratives: in *Wag the Dog* there is the reality narrative and, within that, the war narrative that is fed to the American public; in *Saving Private Ryan* there is the contemporary setting of the old man at the gravesite, which leads into the interior, analeptic narrative of the war; and in *Big Fish* Ed Bloom's tales are the metadiegetic stories told in the "real world" diegetic situation in which Will is trapped by his journalistically stunted imagination. These framing situations create an image of emotionally conflicted dialogue, in cinema's mimetic form, between our senses of reality and representation, which is a dynamic I will be exploring in *Mason & Dixon*. Firstly, though, I will lay the groundwork for this discussion in respect to these three movies.

### Something Fishy

In "Modern Metamorphoses and Disgraceful Tales" (2001), Jonathan Lamb conducts a brutal and evocative investigation of sympathy down the ages, from the early sixteenth-century paintings of Piero di Cosimo to two recent works of fiction by J. M. Coetzee, concentrating on how "the three linked elements of sympathy, death, and metamorphosis recur in the history of representation,"<sup>30</sup> and investigating Coetzee's suggestion of disgrace as dismantling the barrier David Hume and Adam Smith, the eighteenth-century philosophers of sympathy, found inherent in the imagination's attempt to enter the subjective being of the other. Looking specifically at the eighteenth-century fascination with fictional life histories ostensibly told by inanimate objects, as well as other realms of metamorphosis, Lamb is interested in how "death, violence, disgust, or the autonomy of manufactured goods pierce the

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<sup>30</sup> Lamb 135.

barrier between species and species, or between species and things."<sup>31</sup> Implying a lesson for today's mass-market, consumption-driven society, in which humans are disgraced by the autonomous narratives told by the fetishised objects of capitalism, not to mention the dehumanising effects of capitalism itself, he concludes that "we should worry not about extending sympathy, but that it is already too disgracefully extended."<sup>32</sup>

While Lamb investigates narratives of the inanimate or trans-species, his article is suggestive in terms of the brand of sentimentalism I am discussing here, where the image of the human other inheres in representation – either on screen or in the language of fictional discourse. His discussion of Dutch still-lives and *trompe l'oeil* is particularly illuminating in its evocation of the contemporary fascination, fear, and anxiety that lurked within the encounter of a form that "loses all trace of its production to become indistinguishable from what it shows," where "the elimination of a human presence emerges as the triumph of an object proclaiming its self-origination over a viewing subject prone to believe what it says."<sup>33</sup> Referring to the tradition's origins in images of *memento mori*, Lamb suggests that "[i]t is not surprising that a genre whose message of human mortality evolves into the autonomy of things should provoke feelings Coetzee might recognise,"<sup>34</sup> going on to elaborate this connection with humiliation and disgrace: the human subject's helplessness before the autonomy of the artefact that has been invested with a transferred humanity. It is interesting to expand this discussion into the realm of the inter-subjective intimacy proposed by the sentimental ideology in the films I have referred to above, where Hollywood's and television's versions of "the real" act equally to our disgrace, humiliation and abjection.

In *Saving Private Ryan* and *Big Fish*, as with so many sentimental films, we find death as the focus of our sympathetic involvement, foregrounded

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* 139

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* 166

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* 140

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* 141-2

from the outset, either with the grave-scene opening of the first film, or with the unambiguous knowledge early on that Ed Bloom “does not have much time left.” It is, as Lamb refers to throughout his article, the intimation of death that, down the ages, has catalysed the fantasy of metamorphosis, transmigration, or sentimental identification. In the case of these two films, death is laid out for us in the diegetic context—in, that is, the Hollywood images of contemporary American life, where the pictorial realism not only recalls *trompe l’oeil* but where the impossible perfection of the characters disgraces us by its arrogation of our reality: already we are set up for the “too disgracefully extended” sympathy in which we enjoy the reality of the screen. Both films, though, reinforce this reality-status by their movement into the metadiegetic, either World War Two or the fantastical tales of Ed Bloom.

To take *Saving Private Ryan* first: this film was famous, even before its release, for the twenty-five minute, highly “realistic” opening sequence of graphic violence depicting the D-Day invasion at Omaha Beach. With the actual opening scene being one of contemporary realism, however, the constructed, representational nature of the “realism” of the battle scene is even further reinforced. In the first instance, audiences are already primed for a “realistic” version of the battle, which emphasises its packaged verisimilitude and looks forward to its Academy Awards—for director, cinematography, film editing, sound, and sound effects editing. When this scene is pushed further into the realms of mere representation by its metadiegetic enfolding within a “realistic,” contemporary setting, the violence and war scenes to follow are further reduced in terms of *their* apparent (yet also apparently constructed) “realism,” falling rather into the traditional category of generic war-film or even comic-strip, where the hero survives and the good guys win. The second of these expectations is already assured by history, and the former, as Warhol notes, has, we think, been assured by the nature of the original move between the diegetic levels, where the older Ryan is disingenuously implied to in fact be Miller. It is not until the very end of the marathon metadiegetic passage that the director’s deceit is uncovered, further

destabilising the reliability of the metadiegetic narrative, and the moral weight of the movie returns to the “real” realism of the contemporary setting.

This is where the disgrace of our sentimentalism comes into play: the untold deaths we have witnessed (and which have been the film’s talking point) have all taken place within the cartoon world of representation – representation that we read *as* representation. With the deep resonance of “Earn this” we are returned to the Hollywood version of humanist modernity, where a single life is sacred, where the death scene is a moment of profound, even transcendent communication, and where a moral life is one devoted to fulfilling a righteous destiny. Miller’s death, then, rightly belongs to the diegetic scenes, which is why it must be guarded until the final moments. Warhol’s subject’s “wave of sensation” at this point is the destruction of his pleasure in mere entertainment, in which he “surprises himself with the depth of his gratification at seeing *representations* of German soldiers being killed” (my italics).<sup>35</sup> At the moment of the return, however, through death, into the privileged zone of the diegetic setting and contemporary, humanist reality, the *trompe l’oeil* effect takes over and the viewer is disgraced by his alienation before this manifestation of “real life” – *in the inanimate* – and his own moribundity and interminable failures to emulate the Hollywood version of the real, finding himself instead in a darkened movie theatre crying his eyes out.

*Big Fish* is sentimentally conservative on numerous levels, from its images of heterosexual domesticity and the nuclear family (Josephine is pregnant of course),<sup>36</sup> to the glancing shot of college girls studying market economics, to Karl the Giant’s finding wholesome employment as a circus freak, and to the chauvinism of Jenny’s unrequited love for Ed Bloom leaving her a mere divorcee (that is, witch). In the realm of Ed’s fictional histories this conservatism is taken to another, fantastical level: America of the nineteen

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<sup>35</sup> Warhol xv.

<sup>36</sup> The one glaring flaw in the plot is in this respect actually elided. Why, we might ask, has Will’s mother never simply told him the real versions of events? Possibly because in this world it would not be her place to speak out and thus undermine her husband.



fifties or sixties – specifics are unclear and irrelevant – is portrayed as an idyllic “old world”; on top of this, the town of Spectre is an asexual fantasy-land, where girls in white dresses serve pie to men in white suits; Ed’s love-at-first-sight wooing of Sandra (Alison Lohman) comes directly out of an instructional guide for romantic love; and Ed’s one African American childhood friend comes across as a straight-faced interpretation of *Southpark*’s Token. What we found in the ideological arrangement of diegetic levels in *Saving Private Ryan*, then, is even more glaring in this case: the “real” of the diegetic setting is sentimentally contrasted with the “ideal” of the metadiegetic setting, which of course shores up the former’s reality status. The diegetic “reality” is transiently presented as the deprived and disgraced human world that cannot fulfil Ed’s conservative, puritan fantasies, and he is valorised for his sentimental abandonment of this reality. As with *Saving Private Ryan*, the tear-jerking moments of this film lie on the threshold between the diegetic and metadiegetic, but here they are bound up in the movie’s generalised sentimentalism, which ultimately adds extra weight to its alienating version of reality.

Thus, at the beginning of the film, Will is estranged by the autonomy of his father’s fictions, just as we are estranged by the autonomy of cinematic realism. At this point, the visual presentation of Ed’s oral stories creates the possibility of a sympathy-in-disgrace between the audience and Will, because these images shore up the reality status of Will’s diegetic world *as disgraced*, just as our personal world is disgraced by this Hollywood image of reality. As the real time of the movie proceeds, however, and Will uncovers more and more of the “real truth” behind his father’s stories, he is saved from disgrace because these stories are reducible, as I mentioned above, to his reality, belying his original claim that “it’s impossible to separate the fact from the fiction” – the fundamental point, ultimately, is that it *is* possible to do just that. Meanwhile, the oral, rather than visual, nature of the stories is increasingly foregrounded, with the kindly Dr. Bennett (Robert Guillaume), Jenny, and finally Will himself taking over the story-telling function. Rather

than an autonomous threat to human presence, these stories now become part of the sentimental vision of the film's reality, ensconced in communal values as merely "tall tales." In the final scene, Ed's funeral, multiple characters from his tall tales appear, now "reduced to certainty" (an important phrase from *Mason & Dixon* that I will return to) in terms of the film's realism, and we see these characters in animated conversation, all sharing their stories of Ed Bloom. At the same time, of course, the audience has been even more effectively alienated from this increasingly autonomous, harmonious and certain reality, humiliated again by their shabby investment in ten dollar disgrace: the good cry in this film, and I cannot emphasise this enough, comes at the moments where Will's alienation is ameliorated and the audience's, consequently, is exacerbated.

### **Reflexive Disgrace in *Wag the Dog***

While we can sympathise with Warhol's shock at finding herself weeping at the manifestly contrived "Courage, Mom" in *Wag the Dog*, on reflection the sentimental response is not so alarming. As I have said, the war narrative in this film, while we are involved in its construction, is also presented to us as a metadiegetic narrative through the media images within the diegetic frame. That is, television news items are consistently shown throughout the movie to convey to us the success of the fraud; and, indeed, the behaviour of any member of the public, who as such is outside the sphere of privileged knowledge, constitutes a part of this metadiegetic narrative. Thus, for example, after Brean's injunction to the insiders (in order to arouse suspicion) to "deny, deny, deny," when we see a White House spokesman doing just that, while reporters assail him with questions about "the Albania situation," these figures are all participating in the to-us-fictional, but to-them-real, narrative of war.

The use of the television as a means of conveying the metadiegetic narrative is not, however, arbitrary; more powerfully than the movies, perhaps, television is the fundamental agent of disgrace in contemporary

culture, with its constant presence offering endless versions, within our homes, of autonomous realities that mock the humanity of the lives we attempt, nonetheless, to believe in. (Nobody – or nearly nobody – on television watches television.) Thus, when we watch *Wag the Dog* we are already acculturated to respond to the television images: despite our “better” knowledge, when the television is on in this movie we acknowledge our membership in the disgraced public and, like them, acquiesce to this “greater reality” – where war heroes know Morse code (and the villains do not), where there is ever an expert at hand to decode these messages for us, and where their translation can be rendered in a voice as smooth, silky and sincere as their moral significance demands. “Courage, Mom” *must* resonate with us, because it is the voice of the ubiquitous, autonomous reality that defines our perpetual disgrace: our own “knowledge,” by contrast, is as disgraceful and abject as we are.

As I said, this is no arbitrary move on the part of Levinson’s directing. Indeed, another interesting element in this respect is the figure of Johnny Green (Willie Nelson), who is enlisted to write patriotic songs for “the cause.” In the early stages we witness the song-writing process, as well as the recording of “We Guard Our American Borders,” which unfortunately must be abandoned because of the sudden cessation of the war. When the captive-hero theme is developed, however, a new song must be written, this time an old-style blues number called “Good Ol’ Shoe,” the nickname, the television informs us, of Sergeant Schumann. Not only this, but the song is recorded, pressed, given a false date from the nineteen thirties, and surreptitiously installed in the Library of Congress, only to be “rediscovered” as public sentiment swells over the fate of Schumann. There are, additionally, at least two more songs that are written, one with a military rhythm, and the refrain, “The Men of the 303,” Schumann’s fictional “elite force,” and another, more sentimental, with the key phrase, “Courage, Mom.” These latter songs, though, are only fed to the audience through our status as members of the public, consuming this metadiegetic narrative: we do not see the songs

composed or recorded, but rather we simply hear them over the action of the film, just as the public of the movie hears them – out of radios and televisions in the amorphous image of reality that our media constitutes. The significance of this, which goes beyond Warhol's innocent tears, can be noted in this entry on *Wag the Dog* from the Wikipedia:

Strangely, none of [the songs mentioned above] made it onto the soundtrack which was released on CD: it featured only [Mark] Knopfler's instrumentals. In light of the popularity of the pieces, the soundtrack received overwhelmingly negative responses from buyers who...considered the excision wholly unjustified.<sup>37</sup>

This audience confusion as to the status of these songs (Knopfler's soundtrack is, after all, a different product from the film itself) points to the extent of the audience's assimilation of their role as the diegetic public of the film. Their frustrated desire to own these songs, then, is further telling, in that it reflects a murky intersection of the film's sentimental operations: on the one, ironic hand, the songs are associated with the audience's pleasure in the cynical construction of the war narrative; on the other, disgraced hand, they are enjoyed "in their own right" as the pure products of that war's reality.

I need, in this respect, to make one final observation about the audience's role in this film, which I think clearly indicates Levinson's intention that Warhol should be affected by the sentiment of "Courage, Mom." In recognising our status as a public consumer of the sentimentalised narrative of war, as conveyed through the reality of the public media, we can observe also how unimpressed we are in this role by the performance of the opposing presidential candidate, John Neal, when *he* appears on the television screens, denouncing the president and calling for evidence of the war. In attempting to oppose the media reality, Neal is disgraced and humiliated, speaking the cluttered language of the equally disgraced public, which has no autonomy in the face of the inanimate humanity represented by the sentimental discourse of spin. He is just another whining human, whose

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<sup>37</sup> "Wag the Dog." [a]

language of rationality fails to signify in any meaningful way against the alienating formulae of pure autonomy. What did he say? What is he talking about? His humiliated defeat is palpable in its inaudibility against the songs of war.

Recognising this, we can also recognise that there is another level at which we are an audience constituted of the disgraced public: the “real” (extradiegetic) level, which I have already referred to in respect to *Saving Private Ryan* and *Big Fish*. As the media discourse in the film begins to saturate even our “privileged” role, and we find ourselves humming along to the obscure words of “The Men of the 303” (and subsequently wanting to purchase this song for private consumption), our role as viewers of both the film’s diegetic and metadiegetic levels becomes increasingly blurred. We can, nonetheless, still detect that while in the latter role we are unimpressed by Neal’s performance, in the former role we are actually pleased by this intelligence – because it confirms for us his impending electoral defeat: we know he will lose because he loses for us, because as members of the diegetic public we know who we will be voting for. Indeed, we want him to lose. Furthermore, we want the war narrative to be a success. We love Conrad Brean precisely because of his Hobbesian contempt for us and for the electoral process: in the humiliation of our sentimental abandon we accept the righteousness of this contempt – the contempt of autonomy for the slaves of sympathetic disgrace. This is brought home ultimately at the film’s end when Stanley Motss insists that he wants “the credit” for such a successful production, thus abandoning his place within autonomous, constructed reality and inscribing himself in the disgraced realm of the consuming public. As he is led away compliantly towards his execution, it is as though he, and the audience, are convinced of the appropriateness of his fate: this death, simply another in the debased human world, is not deserving of the sentimental status accorded to death within the “real” of Hollywood narrative, particularly as Motss has disgraced himself so much as to willingly

give up that status in a slavish return to the world whose alienation he has himself created.

### ***Mason & Dixon: Sentiment and Representation***

The audience of *Wag the Dog* enjoys a triple status: as willing participants in the deception; as part of the movie's diegetic public, engaging in the metadiegetic narrative of war; and as the extradiegetic public, (hopefully) knowingly humiliated in their sentimental acquiescence to the autonomous reality of Hollywood. The audience's movement between these roles underscores the success of the satire, alerting us to our complicity in, and vulnerability to, sentiment that involves the disgraced loss of autonomy in the perception of a greater reality within the inanimate world of the screen. *Big Fish*, more insidiously, inscribes within that privileged, inanimate world a version of nostalgic sentimental reality, which it pretends to share with its audience, where community and family are maintained through an oral tradition that eschews modernity's insistence on separating "the fact from the fiction." As I have argued, this film uses shifts between diegetic levels to at once reinforce the social value of the indiscriminating oral narrative within the "real" of the film's diegetic narrative, while concurrently debasing the audience by its maintenance of the fact/fiction dichotomy, leaving us beyond the pale of the sentimental affirmation that the film putatively performs for us. As with the *trompe l'oeil*, the autonomous human reality of the screen derives from its capacity for visual mimesis (denying the element of representation) as well as from its production budgets, which create the possibility of unparalleled examples of capitalism's versions of human perfection. In the face of this, the audience's humanity is necessarily disgraced.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cinema loses this autonomy (for the better) when it either undermines its own reality status, as, say, in David Lynch's work, or, more compellingly, when its reality is as disgraceful as our own, as in the work of the *Dogma* movement – Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), which I will discuss briefly in my next chapter, is an important antecedent to this movement.

My discussion of *Mason & Dixon* throughout the remainder of this thesis will revolve around its translation of the cinematic relationship between diegetic levels into the realm of linguistic narrative, which, rather than re-enforcing the representation/reality dichotomy, fundamentally undermines this, representing itself throughout *as* representation and creating the possibility of sentimentalism without disgrace. This is achieved by way of the novelistic foregrounding of the narrating voice, which, in the nineteenth-century realist tradition, tends to create the image of an autonomous narrative realm, arrogating the status of human experience and creating, therefore, a deep suspicion of literary sentimentalism.<sup>39</sup> As I have argued above, this suspicion has played a vital role in the modernist disavowal of the nineteenth-century realist tradition, engendering a movement towards narrating figures characterised by incompleteness and linguistic excess: that is, the modernist narrative is contained, and disgraced, by the autonomy of the word – which thus dignifies the reader's role in the narrative production because the word remains irreducibly human – rather than disgracing humanity by an autonomous containment of its (humanity's) word. At the same time, modernism has performed a disavowal of sentimentalist themes – by

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<sup>39</sup> This view, however, is also to a certain extent an anachronistic fallacy. As Jonathan Culler has recently argued, the concept of "omniscience," which is largely derided by the anti-realist movement for its hegemonic curtailment of "true" experience, is in fact something of a sentimental notion in itself. Culler demonstrates convincingly that the collective attributes of "omniscience" are mutually incompatible features of different narrating personae, none of which is actually "omniscient" in itself. [Culler (2001).] In this sense, the attribution of "omniscience" seems like a bad-faith ascription of autonomy to a discourse that does not demand it – a willed sentimentalist disgrace. This resonates in terms of Bakhtin's "dialogism," because Culler's dissection of the "omniscient" narrator points to this figure's embodiment of social, rather than hegemonic, discourse (heteroglossia, in other words). What we are dealing with, more likely, is the novel's ongoing formal self-redefinition, which Bakhtin identifies in "Epic and the Novel." [Bakhtin 3-40.] This is conceivable as the novel's internal management of its own sentimental bias, which, without renewal, tends towards stasis and hegemony. Indeed, as Friedrich Schiller conceives of the sentimental, as opposed to the simple or naïve poet, the former "can only manifest himself...as aspiring to unity" [Schiller 285], attempting "to raise reality to the ideal...to represent the ideal," which "being an infinite that he never succeeds in reaching...[he] can never become perfect to his kind." [ibid. 286.] This progressive (modern) take on the sentimental, as innovative rather than conservative, is suggestive in terms of the novel, as is Lesley Sharpe's observation that "[s]ome critics [of Schiller's essay] prefer to use the term 'reflective' both to clarify the meaning and to avoid the negative connotations of the English 'sentimental'." [Sharpe 177.]

circumscribing death within irony, reducing it to the existential rather than the transcendent, or simply moving it away from centre-stage.

Radically disembodimenting the narrating agent in *Mason & Dixon* – through an explicit referencing of the movie screen – Pynchon in this novel carries forward the modernist project with, ironically, a voice that is nonetheless stable and coherent, imbued with an endlessly underdetermined haecceity that, as such, signifies as pure representation. It signifies, that is, *as* signification, through a language that is here perceived as social, rather than subjective, discourse. As the purveyor of the formal impetus behind this project, the sentimental movie remains a privileged touchstone throughout *Mason & Dixon*, called up at various moments in respect to the novel's manifold modes of signification as well as in its narrative trajectory and, most importantly for this thesis, in its sentimental denouement. As I found with the films discussed above, this sentimentalism is manifest at the liminal surfaces between reality and representation. However, in contrast to the alienating, autonomous reality that we find in film and television culture, and that Lamb finds in fetishised, manufactured objects, the reality that inheres in *Mason & Dixon* remains articulated and perceived only within – and in tension with – the pervasiveness of representation that defines the novel's narrating voice. In this respect, our sentimental relation to the novel plays out with authenticity the illusion of communal affirmation-through-story that I found operating in *Big Fish*. This is because, rather than being “reduced to certainty,” the representations of the novel enjoy a reality-status only at the behest of the reader's imaginative work within the language of those representations: the realist demands on sentiment – character, situation and sympathy – are always in *Mason & Dixon* drawn out of representation only through the reader's active, and therefore autonomous, engagement with the novel's discourse, a discourse that, as the *representation of discourse*, is only meaningful while it is consciously read *as* representation.



## Section Two

### *Chapter Two: Screen-Play*

The narrating strategies of *Mason & Dixon* involve a recuperation of the singular, extra-heterodiegetic narrator that has been continuously problematised by the modernist avant-garde. As I have argued in the preceding chapter, the identity of this narrating figure rests on the compelling power of narrative to create the illusion of a unified underlying consciousness given coherent expression through language. The putative humanity of this figure provides the underlying groundwork for sentiment in the modern novel, beyond the affective immediacy offered by the epistolary form. This unidentified narrator, that is, engages readers in a morally coloured relationship to the events of the novel, a relationship that is built upon sympathetic perspectives and sentimental idealisations. This narrator can either be viewed as a necessary product of the novel's biases and privileges, as the voice by which these are given shape, or, conversely, it can be regarded as the agent responsible for these biases and privileges. Either way, the narrator is inextricable from the attitudes, perspectives and points of view that his narration evokes and which bespeak the privileged sites of sympathetic appeal necessary for sentimental resonance. The success of this rhetorical manipulation depends, furthermore, on readers' acceptance of the narrating voice as one whose representations they are willing to be moved by. The more successful this operation, the more seemingly transparent becomes the act of narration, to the point where the narrating presence is all but obfuscated by the apparent seamlessness of their representations. This kind of narrating hegemony, obscured from sight by its pervasiveness, relies on

readers' far going sentimental idealisation of the narrating voice, which is regarded not only as unified and whole but also as unifying and wholly reliable: the acceptance of the narrating voice, in other words, involves its idealisation as an authority, worthy of trust, that gives coherence and meaning to its representations.<sup>1</sup> The narrating voice constitutes a sentimentalised agency, one whose moral weight rests on its linguistically embodied semblance of subjective (human) identity, but one whose rhetorical power lies in readers' wholesale acquiescence to, and acceptance of, its signifying function, to the extent that its subjectivity is misconstrued as the solitary purveyor of truth and the conveyor of a meaningfulness by which this truth is apprehended.

### **The Narrator's Fate**

The relativising impetus of nineteenth-century Western thought, from Nietzsche to Marx to Freud, bequeathed an intellectual and artistic legacy discomfited by the inherited conception of a unified, self-knowing subject, ontologically and epistemologically unaffected by history and the psyche. In the twentieth century, structuralist psychoanalysis posited language as the critical site for the construction and deconstruction of this image of a circumscribed subjectivity. This is one important context for the development of the modernist and postmodernist novel, where, speaking very broadly, an effort has been made to represent, through language, the vagaries, uncertainties and contradictions of the subjective experience. Perceiving complicity between sentimentalism, which was anathema to the modernists, and the simplistic image of unified subjectivity, the modernist impulse to undermine both found effect in a relativising representation of consciousness that was deemed both ethically and aesthetically meritorious. This project extended to the construction of narrating identities that are characterised by

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<sup>1</sup> Clearly, of course, the issue of the "unreliable narrator" is raised here, but this figure does not contradict my argument: their significance, in fact, rests on the precise attention they draw to the power invested in their station, which is not undermined so much as highlighted by their unreliability.

unreliability, fragmentation, vacillation and susceptibility to destabilising eruptions of the subconscious. At the same time, there has been an attempt to divorce the narrator from an overt involvement in the contrivances of plot, the artificially constructed elements of suspense, mystery and anticipation that make the gap between *fabula* and *szujet* pregnant with implications of revelation, closure and completeness, as exemplified by the mystery or crime novel. As Forster observed,<sup>2</sup> story is the seemingly unavoidable Achilles heel of the modernist desire to liberate the novel from contingencies that detract from “pure” concentration on language as a reflection of awareness.

Nonetheless, by downplaying the importance of plot as a structuring device, the modernist novel has weakened the sense of the narrator as an intentional organising force, a repository of knowledge, and a self-conscious arbiter of that knowledge’s distribution. Rather than an apparently contained and whole individual subjectivity, seemingly omniscient, omnipotent and with an aesthetic vision of absolute coherence over its subject matter, the modernist narrator enjoys at best only a partial ownership of these qualities.

Pynchon’s early novels, *V.* and particularly *Gravity’s Rainbow*, are exemplars of this modernist disempowerment of the narrating figure. Indeed, it seems likely that Pynchon’s own disparagement of his novella, *The Crying of Lot 49*,<sup>3</sup> has at least something to do with this work’s largely traditional narration, which, by not problematising the seeming coherence of the narrator’s role, inscribes this figure with the hegemonic qualities of totality and control. The withholding of possibly revelatory information at the novella’s close in this context bears the suggestion of caprice on the narrator’s part, in contrast, say, to Slothrop’s fading from the narrator’s attention in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which is in keeping with the fracturing of the narrating presence in that novel. As with other examples from the modernist tradition,

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<sup>2</sup> Forster writes: “Yes — oh dear yes — the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels, and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different — melody, or perception of the truth, not this low atavistic form.” Forster 34.

<sup>3</sup> Pynchon, *SL* 22.

however, Pynchon's experiments with a refracted narrating consciousness are unable to fully undermine this consciousness, for the necessity that the narrative retain a degree of coherence and meaningfulness.<sup>4</sup> This is the unrelenting anxiety at the heart of modernist narrative that Forster perceives, and Pynchon seems to be referencing the same anxiety in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where, in a densely packed passage, the writing, reading and interpretive processes are collectively lambasted in the figure of the "sentimental surrealist,"<sup>5</sup> the human subject searching for or constructing coherence and order within an incoherent and disordered universe. As long as there is a story being told, the avant-garde novelist remains to an extent a sentimental surrealist, and the modernist revolution in narrating possibilities continues to be tied to the pre-modernist tradition and is defined or understood in terms of that tradition.

The break from this that Joyce attempted in *Finnegans Wake* was to subordinate narrative absolutely to the imperatives of language, to the extent that any attempt to account for the novel in realist terms or to summarise its plot is fundamentally flawed and ultimately ridiculous. While in *Ulysses* Joyce works the reader into an understanding of the text through signifying narrating stances, in *Finnegans Wake* no such concession is made and the narrative seems to advance of its own steam, with a momentum generated not by its human content but by linguistic play. This is a significant move because it is arguably the moment when experimentation breaks down the boundaries of the novel and creates an independent genre, or at least a new way of representing consciousness in the novel that transcends the humanist demand for plot and character.

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting in this context that in *Ulysses*, Joyce structures his novel around the deployment of a variety of imaginative responses to traditional narration but that the cumulative effect of these, how they signify in respect to each other, is necessary for the novel's accretion of meaningfulness. Also, the experiments, speaking generally, become more radical and challenging as the novel progresses, implying the difficulty Joyce perceived in constructing a narrative that was, from the outset, profoundly new.

<sup>5</sup> Pynchon, GR 696.

A similar exercise was carried out by the French writer, Raymond Roussel, whose “How I Wrote Certain of My Books” (c1931) provides an insight into a method of narrative composition, based on elaborate punning, that renders content wholly contingent upon an imaginative play with language. As Roussel’s therapist, Dr. Pierre Janet observed, Roussel was opposed to any reality infiltrating his writing, which he envisioned as a purely linguistic exercise. Roussel, he wrote,

has a very interesting conception of literary beauty, it is essential that a work should not contain anything real, no observations of the real or spiritual world, only entirely imaginary combinations, these are already the conceptions of a world beyond that of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

While methodological traces of his technique may be apparent to an alert reader of his original French, when read in translation the process of his creative work is wholly detached from its product, and what remains is a succession of images in parable-like form that is at once seemingly arbitrary and profound. It is no surprise that Roussel was ridiculed by the literary public of his time, or that he was to be celebrated by such avant-gardists as Breton, Robbe-Grillet and Dali. Roussel’s status or place is difficult to reckon, as his influence, especially in respect to a system of plotting that is intentional only in respect to fulfilling a linguistic requirement, is negligible. His work can almost be regarded as a path that the novel never took, and it remains a quintessential cul-de-sac of literature. Nonetheless, his personal conviction as to the value of his work, and his belief that critical acclaim was inevitable, is interesting. Roussel anticipated the modernist struggle between realism and aesthetics, between utility and creativity, and his answer was one of uncompromising clarity: realism must be sacrificed to an absolute formalism for the sake of an artistic autonomy unencumbered by humanist encroachments. While it is not perhaps surprising that this vision did not gain cultural traction, nor is it reasonable to dismiss Roussel as merely self-indulgent, deluded or mad. Rather, his unique body of works testifies to a

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<sup>6</sup> Janet 41.

transcendence of the modernist novel's discomfort with the status of a narrating voice, achieved by reducing the act of narration to an articulation of an otherwise-determined content, generated by arbitrary patterns of language rather than by the specific demands of plot. The crude functionality of Roussel's prose, which was criticised for its lack of style, is the product of a concentration on the mechanics of language-in-itself rather than on language as a vehicle for the expression of subjective identity.

The significance of these forms of high modernism to my discussion of *Mason & Dixon* lies in how they represent the extreme end of a certain trajectory within the aesthetics of the novelistic avant-garde.<sup>7</sup> While *Mason & Dixon* may be regarded as a humanist novel in the reading I am giving it, and while its recuperation of a single, unified narrator seems necessary for the rendering of that humanist element, it is intriguing to consider the extent to which the construction and realisation of this narrator echoes in certain important respects the narrating tactics found in the novels of the anti-humanist avant-garde. These echoes reflect Pynchon's re-imagining of traditional narration taking place within the modernist context and in a modernist spirit, yet they are not absolute. Rather, they point to a manner in which the problematising aesthetics of modernism are able to invigorate the production and signifying potential of traditional narrating hegemonies. While to a writer like Roussel, the manner of composition, the linguistic element, is paramount, to the Pynchon of *Mason & Dixon* these concerns are ultimately subordinate to the details of the world he is attempting to represent. That said, however, Pynchon's representations by way of his narrator depend in the first instance on his establishment of that narrator as a unique product of a modernist sensibility. In other words, while modernism has struggled to undermine the authority of the self-aggrandising narrator, in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon directs the lessons of this struggle to the creation of just such a narrator, who enjoys both the humanist rhetorical power of his

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<sup>7</sup> The work of another French novelist, Pierre Guyotat, provides a further compelling example in his novel *Eden Eden Eden* (1970).

traditional status and the cultural and signifying freedoms of modernist anti-realism. In this manner, *Mason & Dixon* is able to traverse the contested ground from literalism to surrealism, from archaism to anachronism, from the literary to the pop-cultural, and from the self-referential to the sentimental.

### **The Narrating of *Mason & Dixon***

In an early response to *Mason & Dixon*, Bernard Duyfhuizen<sup>8</sup> discusses its narrating configurations in terms of Gérard Genette's taxonomies in his highly influential work, *Narrative Discourse* (1972). Duyfhuizen states that "Cherrycoke's narration is ... an intradiegetic narration that shifts from a heterodiegetic to a homodiegetic to, on brief occasions, an autodiegetic relationship to the narrated events."<sup>9</sup> Duyfhuizen distinguishes Cherrycoke from "[t]he narrating voice that opens the text at its outermost extradiegetic level [which] comes from an undramatized narrator whose historical narrating situation is more likely the late twentieth rather than the late eighteenth century," and he claims that "[t]hroughout the text... the extradiegetic voice signals its presence when the narrative transmission requires some management." Duyfhuizen has already noted that the novel's frames "seem to be designed to deconstruct themselves"<sup>10</sup> and he goes on to illustrate this with respect to the meditation from the novel that begins, "[o]ne reason Humans remain young so long [...]" (37), which, he states, though to appearance Cherrycoke's belief, "must be grammatically and rhetorically attributed to the extradiegetic narrator. For the reader, however, bits of the text such as this become part of a dialogic matrix of double-voiced narration that allows Pynchon to play with his text to produce complex effects."<sup>11</sup> Finally, Duyfhuizen discusses the fluid narrating situation of chapters fifty-three and fifty-four, dealing with the story of Eliza Fields, which he does in the terms he has already established, and he ultimately concludes that "[t]he

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<sup>8</sup> "Reading at the 'Crease of Credulity'." Horvath and Malin 132-142.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* 135

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* 134

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 136

narrative of *Mason & Dixon* ... is so multivoiced that readers may be better off getting lost in its wilderness of narrators and voices than trying to carve a clear and straight Visto through its thicket of words."<sup>12</sup>

While it is reasonable to claim that *Mason & Dixon*'s narrative levels "seem to be designed to deconstruct themselves," Duyfhuizen's discussion fails to get to the heart of this matter. Certainly it is true that *Mason & Dixon* involves "a dialogic matrix of double-voiced narration that allows Pynchon to play with his text to produce complex effects," but the passage Duyfhuizen uses to illustrate this is merely an example of the primary narrator<sup>13</sup> narrating Cherrycoke's thoughts, which is hardly a revolutionary technique by the late twentieth century. Duyfhuizen gets closer to a useful insight when he suggests, in the same context, that "[b]ecause part of Cherrycoke's narrating situation is his belated arrival for Mason's funeral, his narration of Mason's last days merges dialogically with the extradiegetic narrator's voice to form an elegiac yet ironic narrative of Mason's death and his sons' inheritance of America,"<sup>14</sup> but he does not elaborate on or scrutinize this observation. And his final injunction to readers, that they should get lost in *Mason & Dixon*'s "wilderness of narrators and voices" is sound but slightly misleading advice, which Duyfhuizen himself could well benefit from. Instructional generalisations about Pynchon's works are seldom helpful, but here Duyfhuizen gets close to one that, while perhaps a truism of all reading, is particularly useful when reading any of Pynchon's works: trust the narration without reflecting on it excessively; become immersed in it and stay immersed; trust your instincts, because if something, however bizarre, seems to be happening, it probably is. In this respect, it is not so much a matter of "getting lost" in the narration of *Mason & Dixon* but of reading it as it seems designed to be read, without being distracted by irrelevancies. Such an

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 140

<sup>13</sup> As will become clear, it is ultimately difficult for me to describe the narrator in Genette's terms: I will use these terms heuristically in my argument, but for the most part, when speaking generally, I will fall back on the term "primary narrator" to designate the voice that predominates across diegetic levels in *Mason & Dixon*.

<sup>14</sup> Duyfhuizen 136.



irrelevancy is represented by Duyfhuizen's claim that "the reader is still nagged by the problem of narrative reliability,"<sup>15</sup> this referring, he has already told us, to the question: "'How can we know this narrative is a faithful and true account of the events?'"<sup>16</sup> No competent reader of *Mason & Dixon* is in the least concerned about its narrative reliability: *Mason & Dixon* renders the issue of reliability utterly inconsequential.

My discussion in this chapter should elaborate and justify the extent of my dissatisfaction with Duyfhuizen's argument, though it seems to me that his basic error is to adhere too closely to Genette's narratological categories, on a common sense basis, without being sensitive to *Mason & Dixon's* narrative style, which itself performs a thoroughgoing re-imagining of our inherited common-sense views of narrative. At first glance, yes, Cherrycoke's is an intradiegetic narration, if we accept that the metadiegetic stories are actually Cherrycoke's verbal property. I do not accept that, but if I did I could further accept that the narration shifts from heterodiegetic (when Cherrycoke is absent from the narrated scene) to homodiegetic (when he is present) to autodiegetic (when he is on centre stage of the narrated scene, which is arguably the case during the trip to Octarara (353-61), although Luise Redzinger seems a more significant presence here, and Cherrycoke's role could be relegated to that of bystander or observer). By concentrating on these distinctions, however, it seems to me that Duyfhuizen is tying himself down to a reading of the novel that is not in keeping with its formal properties and which imposes on him an attitude to the novel that is not justified by the reading experience. To the extent that they are meaningful in this context, I will here retain the use of Genette's terminology, which Duyfhuizen uses and which enable, while not actually describing *Mason & Dixon's* narration accurately, a very useful way into my attempt at such a description. My argument, then, will ultimately illustrate that Pynchon's version of the "omniscient" narrator renders many of Genette's categories not only

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* 137

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* 134

inappropriate to this novel's narration but positively misleading to any attempt at describing it.

### Flashbacks in Film

While in the past Pynchon has toyed with stylistic references to film and television in his narrative techniques, particularly in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland*, in *Mason & Dixon* he establishes from the outset his narrating voice on the basis of an overt reference to these media, which simultaneously creates the possibility of a radically re-imagined incarnation of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator while also pointing to the necessity that this remains an essentially literary construct that signifies *as* novelistic, rather than cinemagraphic, narrative. Pynchon is inspired by the technique in film and television (which I will call a narrated flashback) whereby a character begins orally recounting a story, event or situation and their narrating voice fades as the scene in which they are present switches to the scene they are describing, which is then played out according to its own requirements, with the narrator's voice-over returning at certain moments and the scene even switching back occasionally to the original setting for the sake of a discussion or enquiry in that context.<sup>17</sup> It is possible for this narrator to have a hetero-, homo- or autodiegetic relationship to the scene they are describing, and directorial strategies generally reflect this, but only in a suggestive, not absolute, sense. Thus, in the case of a heterodiegetic situation, the scene is likely to be played out in whatever manner suits its dramatic content. In a homodiegetic situation, with the narrator merely an observer or bystander, the scene is likely to note their presence and observer status, but the camera will be in no way restricted to representing their point of view or only such information as they may immediately access. Likewise, in the autodiegetic case, with the narrator being the principal actor in the scene being represented, their centrality is likely to be reflected in the representation (they will be frequently in shot and their perspective will often be evoked), but

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<sup>17</sup> We have already encountered this technique with Ed Bloom's stories in *Big Fish*.

again this need not be strictly adhered to, and the narrator's limited access to information will only be referred to if it constitutes an important element of the plot.

In contrast to traditional narrating situations in the novel, this filmic technique allows for far greater freedom in respect to the narrator's apparent knowledge and admits of no shame in respect to what Genette refers to as "that paradoxical – and to some people shameful – situation of a 'first person' narrating that is nevertheless occasionally omniscient."<sup>18</sup> The reasons for this freedom are clear and derive from the unambiguous translation of the representation from one medium (oral narration) to another (filmic presentation), a translation by which the literalist epistemological imperatives of narrative logic are lost. This is because the film content is not to be regarded as a mimetic rendering of the narrated content (which would be clearly impossible), meaning that the narrator of the scene has no ownership of the scene itself, which is at best viewed as an idealised mental picture, a single movie-version of potentially endless imaginative visualisations inspired by the narrator's words (words that are quickly lost to the audience in favour of the scene they refer to), which may be more or less "faithful" to the original – the formal translation involved, because it *cannot* be accurate, opens the possibility for multiple degrees of inaccuracy or interpretation.<sup>19</sup> In this respect, issues of reliability, of the scene's being "a faithful and true account of the events," go out the window because the scene is a self-consciously interpretive reconstruction based on an oral summary of events: there is clearly no immediate (mimetic) relationship between the actual words being spoken (which are never in fact scripted, spoken or heard) and the

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<sup>18</sup> Genette, *ND* 252. A good example of this, among many, is the case of Ishmael, who at times describes intimately situations in which he is not present. Indeed, I cannot help feeling that the famous opening line of *Moby Dick* is intended to call attention to the problematic status of the narrator generally.

<sup>19</sup> The anime-inspired rendering of The Bride's (Uma Thurman) story of O-Ren Ishii's (Lucy Liu) childhood in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003) is a good example of the possibilities offered by the necessary translation from an oral to a visual medium.

scene that is performed, and the narrator's personal situation enjoys only a partial influence on the nature of that performance.

In fact, while in the novel form a metadiegetic narration is marked as such by the narrator's voice — the voice, that is, manifestly belongs to one of the diegetic characters — in the case of film, the subordination of the narrating voice to the formal imperatives of visual presentation, whereby the story is mediated by the ubiquitous presence of the screen and the voice is silenced, means that some degree of unreliability actually becomes the essential factor in identifying the story *as* metadiegetic, as belonging specifically to the putative narrator. This is because in film a narrated flashback or digression that conforms to the ontological and epistemological status of the main story, in terms of content and style, is ultimately indistinguishable from that main story. Although the scene might be prompted by a diegetic character's speech, it fails to be identified with them as long as, in the absence of their voice, the scene is not imbued by them with a mark of their autonomous control. In this case the reliability or ontology of the digression is on a par with that of the situation in which the digression arises (the scene in which it is "told"), and rather than being viewed as belonging to the ostensible intradiegetic narrator, this character acts merely to cue what is no more than a conventional flashback, which I will term a "simple" flashback,<sup>20</sup> in the story's narrative. (In novelistic terms, this might be the equivalent of the narrator's summarising, in their extradiegetic voice, the content of a character's revelatory speech.) To be regarded as truly metadiegetic — that is, the narrative property of a diegetic character — it is necessary that the digression carries an unequivocal mark of that diegetic character's ownership and control, which is achieved by a significant dissonance between the diegetic and the metadiegetic situations.

We have already seen this in the case of *Big Fish*, where Ed Bloom's stories *look* different from the diegetic scenes, marking their ownership by him and their status as "tall stories." An important seminal film in terms of this

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<sup>20</sup> A "simple flashback," then, is more akin to, say, the flashback at the beginning of *Saving Private Ryan*, which never pretends to be a "told" narrative.

technique is Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), where the events are told in five different versions by four different characters,<sup>21</sup> each version quite different, both in terms of its content and in terms of its *look*, from the other four. Robert Altman's comments on this film are useful in terms of my argument here:

The main thing here is that when one sees a film you see the characters on screen, it's not like reading where you imagine certain things, you see very specific things, you see a tree, you see a sword, so you take that, one takes that as truth. But in this film you take it as truth and then you find out that it is not necessarily true and you see these various versions of the episode that has taken place that these people are talking about and you're never told which is true and which isn't true, which leads you to the proper conclusion that it is all true and none of it's true.<sup>22</sup>

*Big Fish*, as I have argued, presents itself as performing a similar relativising of the truth-status of its narrative, but it in fact undermines this function by basing its sentimentalism around a reappropriation of film's power in representing "truth," which Altman alludes to. Altman concludes the above description by suggesting that in the epistemological disruption *Rashomon* performs it becomes "a poem," referring to the inherence of such disruption within language, where visualisation is an imaginative act bound up in one's own language, rather than the disgraceful acceptance of the alien and inanimate, other, vision we encounter on screen.

The importance of a perceptible distinction between the diegetic and metadiegetic in film is brought home to us if we consider a more recent use of the technique, in Bryan Singer's film *The Usual Suspects* (1995). This film is famous for the "twist" at its conclusion, where the audience realises that, firstly, the seemingly innocuous character, Roger "Verbal" Kint (Kevin Spacey), is in fact the criminal mastermind, Keyser Söze, and, secondly, that Verbal's story, which has occupied the lion's share of the film's narrative, is a fictionalised version of actual events, which are in themselves never

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<sup>21</sup> And three of these versions are actually brought to us as they are retold by the narrating figure(s) in the diegetic setting; they are, that is, told twice.

<sup>22</sup> Altman, Robert. "Introduction" to *Rashomon* DVD, The Criterion Collection (2002).

represented. The shock or surprise of this revelation lies in the audience's belated awareness that Verbal's story is not the simple flashback that it at first appears but is, rather, the narrated creation of Verbal himself, a truly metadiegetic narrative. Subsequent viewings of the film are informed by this understanding, which eludes the first-time audience, that while the diegetic representation of events is "reliable," Verbal's story is not faithful to the same history and, in that, is a representation belonging to *his* narrative, a metadiegetic story marked as such by its unreliability in respect to the diegetic story.

While this metadiegetic narrative in *The Usual Suspects* is distinguished from the diegetic story by its unreliability in the sense of it being untrue, the distinction can also be achieved more directly by other indications of dissonance between the two diegetic levels. In the case of *The Princess Bride* (1987), which resembles *Mason & Dixon* inasmuch as it involves an elderly relative telling a fantastical tale to a young boy, this dissonance is clear in three major respects. Firstly, the plots of the diegetic and metadiegetic levels are wholly unrelated. In addition to this, the realism of the contemporary setting of the diegetic story contrasts markedly with the timeless fantasy of the metadiegetic story. And finally, the fact that the metadiegetic story comes from a book that is being read in the diegetic story means that the construction of the former is unarguably anterior to the construction of the latter: the one emanates from, and so is not part of, the other.

These examples contrast with those where there is no apparent or necessary distinction between the provenance of the diegetic story and the putatively metadiegetic digression, where the styles, plots and intentions of both are in harmony, and the character's verbal narration that introduces the digression is no more than a technical device for the introduction of a simple flashback or other such narrative contrivance. While a metadiegetic narrative in the novel is distinguished by its narrator's voice, in film, where the voice is replaced by the screen, it is distinguished by a significant degree of dissonance between the plots, styles, intentions, origins or degrees of

reliability that characterise the diegetic levels and, in their differences, confer meaning on the film as a whole, meaning that bespeaks and depends on an awareness of the distinction between these levels.

This distinction, further, brings into question the ontological status of the metadiegetic events in respect to the screen representation (which we watch) of a verbally narrated story. The twist in *The Usual Suspects* depends on the audience's initial assumption that Verbal's story is merely a simple flashback, an assumption based in part on the fact that his story *looks like* the diegetic story, appears, that is, to be of the same provenance. By contrast, in *The Princess Bride* the appearance, or *look*, of the two levels is distinct from the outset. In these cases, then, the metadiegetic story arises from within the diegetic story; it is a representation of a verbal narration that occurs within the diegetic world. While this diegetic world's appearance on the screen can be regarded as the film's representation of itself, in the metadiegetic case there is an unavoidable suggestion of a translation from an oral to a screen narrative.<sup>23</sup> In terms of the relationship between the diegetic speaker's ostensible verbal narration (only fragments of which the audience is in fact privy to) and the screen representation of this that we witness, the speaker's ownership of the latter is partially undermined by the unambiguous sense that this is merely an interpretation of their words. The distinction I have drawn between a simple flashback and a truly metadiegetic sequence in film is inevitably blurry around the edges because of the element that is indispensable to both: the screen as the medium of transmission. As I have said, the representation on the screen needs to be somehow "coloured" to confer a sense of the diegetic narrator's ownership of that narrative, but a totality of ownership is denied them because the haecceity of their fundamental presence is not built into the visual medium in the way an intradiegetic narrator's voice is built into their metadiegetic narrative in prose. It is this essential ambiguity that allows

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<sup>23</sup> In *Rashomon*, this is emphasised by the long passage at the beginning of the first metadiegetic account: while the narrator is ostensibly telling his story off-screen, we viewers are privileged to an extended scene of pure cinematography where nothing "narratable" is actually happening.

Verbal's story to *look like* the diegetic story while if Marlow's voice were to *sound* like the extradiegetic narrator's, the very sense of his narrative as metadiegetic would be undermined.<sup>24</sup>

The *look*, then, of the intradiegetic passage on screen cannot be wholly attributed to the speaking subject in the way the *sound* of such a passage is necessarily so attributed in the novel. While the metadiegetic status, as I have suggested, is established through some selective dissonance with the diegetic situation, the need for this dissonance to be imposed on the substantive aspects of the passage reflects the impossibility of embodying the narrator's identity within the medium of transmission, which is what is achieved in the novel. Rather, the dissonant elements act as key indicators of the passage's metadiegetic status, in much the same way as typographical features (such as open quotation marks) may indicate a speaker's presence, over and above their *voice*, in prose. Despite the blatant irrationalism of the fictional *voice* (in terms of emulating the way living speakers actually use language), I have already discussed in the previous chapter how this idealisation has nonetheless become the accepted (and seemingly acceptable) site for the expression of fictional subjectivity in the novel, a phenomenon that has arguably as much to do with the centrality of language to subjective consciousness as it has to do with implicit assumptions arising from the contingencies of a literary tradition. It is not reasonable, in that respect, to attribute absolutely the *look* of an intradiegetic passage on screen to the speaker who owns it because, put simply, while all human beings are users of language, very few are directors of film.

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<sup>24</sup> In this respect it is interesting to note that when *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1899-1900) were published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, their typography was rationalised according to that magazine's house style, meaning every paragraph of Marlow's narratives began with an open quotation mark, a format that remains in most editions today; however, when *Chance* (1914) was first published, by Methuen, more of Conrad's original, inconsistent typographical practices were retained, notably far fewer quotation marks emphasising Marlow's speaking voice. The latter example provides a more compelling read in terms of one's sense of absorption within the novel's discourse, yet at the same time the sense of Marlow's voice is never lost, despite its typographical mingling with that of the extra-homodiegetic narrator. For a discussion of *Blackwood's* extensive editing of Conrad, see Knowles.



The actual technical and aesthetic features of a screen's metadiegetic sequences, then, are best viewed as a dialogic representation of intentions and perceptions. While diegetic and simple flashback sequences represent themselves—they are not, that is, owned by a speaking narrator—the facts of the narration and its ownership are built into the manner of representation in the truly metadiegetic case. In addition to this, however, the representation may also figure the imaginative responses of the diegetic audience to the narrative that they (but not we) hear—how *they* picture the scene may be implied in the representation. Also important, as we have seen in the contrasting cases of *The Usual Suspects* and *The Princess Bride*, is how the extradiegetic audience's response is cued by the *look* of the metadiegetic sequence, and, related to this, how this *look* maintains a signifying function in respect to its relationship with the *look* of the diegetic sequences. Although it is possible, then, for a metadiegetic scene to be distinguished from a flashback, the absence of voice and the inhuman ubiquity of the screen mean that this is never as clearly demarcated as it is in the novel. Furthermore, ownership of the metadiegetic sequence that we view is only at best partially enjoyed by the narrating figure because, again, his presence is not immovably integrated within the medium of transmission in the way it is in the novel. The metadiegetic scene emanates from this character in the first instance, draws its life-blood and substantive features from him and could not exist, from the diegetic point of view, without him, yet its representation is freed from his absolute control and involves an amalgamation of features that imply, cinematically, his influence, as well, possibly, as the imaginative responses of his listeners, or of an ideal listener, all of which act, ultimately, as the film's cue to its extradiegetic audience's interpretation or understanding of the scene.

### ***Mason & Dixon and the Screen***

The fundamental formal distinction between the succession of images on screen and the verbal narration of fiction provides the tensions and

possibilities that I am exploring in this discussion of the narrating mechanics of *Mason & Dixon*. The translation of screen techniques into novelistic prose that Pynchon achieves in this novel is the cornerstone of his re-invigorating of the novelistic narrator, most crucially because of the impossibility of a direct and complete translation from one artistic medium to the other. There is, then, a persistent duality to this argument: on the one hand I consider the manners in which the novel emulates the tactics of the screen; on the other, and ultimately more interestingly, this leads me to examine how this emulation is concomitantly refracted by the opposing formal realities of the media and how this inspires in the novel an innovative response to the requirements of the literary genre.

What I am arguing here is that rather than being a traditional metadiegetic narrative in the Marlow sense, Cherrycoke's story is translated in the manner of film, but *in language*, into a "metadiegetic" narrative that enjoys the signifying freedom that we find, unproblematically, in cinema. The *influence* of Cherrycoke is retained in the way that ownership is conferred on a metadiegetic sequence in film, but, as in the latter form, this ownership is translated in a manner that is radically free and calls upon cultural signifiers that represent, or simulate, but do not emulate, Cherrycoke's "original," oral performance. The difficulty that the novel encounters in achieving this translation of a filmic technique into the verbal form of novelistic narrative is that the latter relies, as I have outlined, on the construction of a coherent narrating figure that, because of the inherent humanity that abides within language, inevitably creates the image of a "narrator." *Mason & Dixon*, then, must carefully negotiate the image of its narrating figure so that it may, at once, emulate Cherrycoke's image but *not be reduced to his voice*. While in cinema the obvious translation from the verbal to the visual means this operation is immediately apparent, in *Mason & Dixon* the perpetual presence of narrating language means that it must revolve around a perpetual dialogue, *within language*, whereby the linguistic signifiers that represent both Cherrycoke's influence *and* the translation of this into radically other (non-

linguistic) forms are themselves represented in the voice of the narrating figure, a figure that must resist being conscripted as, simply, Cherrycoke or a spokesperson *for* Cherrycoke. The dialogic web of representation that this involves will be the focus of my next two chapters, but here I must firstly describe how the translation from the filmic to the novelistic is achieved.

As I will argue here, *Mason & Dixon* deals with the problematic necessity of an emergent narrating figure, not by fracturing this figure in the accustomed manner of modernist and postmodernist approaches, but rather by saturating it with an infinite potential for representation. Confronting the difficulty of translating the filmic, visual form into the novelistic, verbal form (the one empty of inherent human content, the other necessarily imbued with this), *Mason & Dixon* creates a narrator who uses his<sup>25</sup> humanity, or *voice*, to signify the *look* that we find on screen (not the content as such, that is, but the manner of representation of this content – animated, say, or self-consciously anachronistic; in sentimental soft-focus or alienating and surreal). At the same time, the novel debars this narrator, despite the humanity that becomes invested in his *voice*, from occupying a specific “place,” or enjoying a specific identity, in terms of the narrated world that the novel creates. This is achieved by endowing the narrator with a diegetic fluidity that means he enjoys no natural “place,” and hence no “given” identity in the world of the novel. This diegetic fluidity, which entails diegetic ubiquity, is the critical “deconstructive” move of the novel: this ubiquity can only be apprehended thanks to the narrator’s perceptible humanity and singularity of voice; yet this ubiquity is also, precisely, responsible for the impossibility, in realist terms, of a singular, human identity inhering within this voice. The voice, then, in its diegetic ubiquity, becomes, in the analogy I am building, the equivalent, in this linguistic context, of the screen in the filmic context that the novel emulates: it takes on the double function of conveying to the reader at any

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<sup>25</sup> The choice of this pronoun is at once problematic and revealing. I would like, that is, to retain the impersonal “it,” but the humanity of the narrator renders this ultimately ridiculous; furthermore, the gendered pronoun here reflects the way Cherrycoke’s (and Pynchon’s) translated influence remains palpable.

given point not only *what*, but also *how*, to read. At the same time, though, the haecceity of this voice imbues it with a palpable human presence, which is able, ultimately, to inform the sentimentalism of the novel.

*Mason & Dixon*'s narrating voice, in other words, is responsible for announcing both the mundane denotative information of the novel (its events) as well as representing the *look* of that information; like the television screen, it simultaneously projects both content and semiotic cues for the reading of that content. At the same time, its ubiquity throughout is further analogically related to this impossible translation from a visual medium to a verbal one: its constant presence reproduces (in translation) the constant presence of the screen itself. This latter is the essential, underlying medium through which film or television is presented, retaining its singular function whatever the diegetic situation, or represented event, and however those situations or events might *look*. It is the inanimate backdrop that denies voice to the form and demands that *voice* be translated into *look*. While a transition between diegetic levels, "on screen," often involves a fading or blurring of the original scene, the screen on which this fading takes place abides: the persistence of the screen demands such a device, because its constant, inhuman presence resists being coopted by a voice. Likewise, as I will explore here, the singularity of the ubiquitous narrating *voice* of *Mason & Dixon* retains its haecceity while it represents, *within that voice*, the manifold *looks* of its various narrated events and diegetic situations.

This narrating voice, then, has a tripartite function: on the most basic level, it describes the events of the narrative; in its ability to endlessly represent or simulate translated versions of cultural forms, it indicates (without describing) the *look* of those events; and in its ubiquity and constant presence, it acts as the screen that demands this translation from *voice* into *look*. (Because there is no one outside the narrator, and he can never be outside himself, because, like the screen, his presence must always underwrite the representation of events, his voice must, like the screen, be able also to contain its *look* within and through its own representations.) The latter two functions,

therefore, become in this form mutually interactive: because the inanimate (screen) is translated into the animate (voice), the representations of the novel, while emulating those of film, are inscribed throughout as linguistic, rather than visual, representations. (Film translates *voice* into *look*; *Mason & Dixon* translates this *look* back into *voice*.) The necessity that the inhuman constancy of the screen be translated into a verbal form means that the resulting voice is both radically singular and radically plural: its singularity (ubiquity) reproduces the singularity of the screen, while its plurality (the necessary result of ubiquity) reproduces the plurality of *looks* that are represented on the screen. As well as allowing *Mason & Dixon* to avoid the hegemonic imperatives of the traditional, pre-modernist narrator of “realism” (while nonetheless benefiting from the legacies of its tradition), this plurality-within-singularity informs every utterance of the novel’s narrating figure, creating, as I will demonstrate in this and my following chapters, a dialogic matrix of linguistic (human) meaningfulness that rapidly eclipses the signifying, and sentimental, potential of the inanimate form that inspires its shape.

### Setting the Scene

Narratives from the latter part of the twentieth century that have attempted to create a filmic atmosphere, such as *Jealousy*, generally do so by having the writing emulate the camera in the sense of its being impersonal, descriptive but not evaluative, and often in the present simple tense.<sup>26</sup> To an extent the narration of *Mason & Dixon* echoes this approach, especially in respect to tense, but at the same time the narrating voice is imbued with a radically underdetermined, but nonetheless unashamedly “human,” identity that places it more squarely within the framework of both the “traditional,” and modernist, novelistic narrator, inclined at once to evince the “human” functions of explanation and evaluation yet remaining, despite this, elusive in its ambiguous and mercurial subjectivity. A way of conceiving of the

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<sup>26</sup> M. Toolan goes so far as to say that present tense narration “is akin to newscast.” Toolan 2691.

important difference between the narration of a novel such *Jealousy*, and that of *Mason & Dixon*, is by regarding the former as evoking the camera while the latter evokes, as I have said, the screen. In other words, while the scenes in *Jealousy* are presented as through a clearly indicated focalising perspective, in *Mason & Dixon* perspective is not overtly privileged and the scenes' representations are rendered as a completed film or television production – shot, cut, edited and playing before us. However, of course, and this must be reiterated, this novel *is* a novel, not film or television, and it is read as a novel, not as film or television. The screen aesthetic that I am invoking here acts more in a functional sense to create the possibility for the re-imagining of novelistic narration that *Mason & Dixon* performs. Because this re-imagining opens up new possibilities for the narrative's signification, the narrator is ultimately less beholden to its screen-inspired genesis than a novel like *Jealousy*, whose entire discourse remains subordinate to its formal emulation of the camera. At the same time, screen traditions remain a privileged touchstone in *Mason & Dixon*'s project of appropriating, and translating into novelistic narrative, cultural discourses and traditions: that these *are* translated, however, renders them ultimately meaningful in terms of the novel *qua* novel, rather than in terms of their original context.

As I indicated in my earlier discussion, the ubiquity of the screen as the medium of transmission is the factor that destabilises the construction of definitive diegetic levels in film or television, in contrast to modern fiction where these are unambiguously identified by individuated narrating voices. The voices of putative narrators in film, that is, are silenced by the inanimate hegemony of the visual medium, which finds its home on the screen, meaning that diegetic ownership must be conveyed by the *look* of that which is projected onto the screen. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon constructs a narrating voice that occupies all the putative diegetic levels with a ubiquity that undermines the novel's framing tactics, tactics that ostensibly point to a narrating structure based on the modern tradition of framed narratives in the novel. Ultimately independent from its genesis in the emulation of the screen,

however, the narrating style that is hereby created lives a literary life of its own, intermittently referencing both its diegetic games and the screen mechanics that give this shape and underlie its expressive possibilities. Both, that is, are vital to the narrative's establishment of its own necessary coherence, yet both are ultimately subordinate to the emergence of that narrative's internal self-definition. In that respect, a preliminary caveat: while in this early discussion I will refer occasionally to visualising the novel as if it were a film, this is no more than a rhetorical device aimed at justifying the coherence of my argument in terms of both the novel *and* the film genre it references. I am not, emphatically, offering these readings as anything more than illustrative of the general point I am making, an element of which is that the formal translation at work here means, ultimately, that such dual-readings are eclipsed and beside the point. The fact that I offer these readings in respect to the early chapters of the novel, when it is in the process of establishing its narrating procedures, is not, therefore, coincidental.

Of the films I have discussed so far, *The Princess Bride* provides the clearest paradigm for the opening sequences of *Mason & Dixon*. There are, in the first instance, certain substantive features that unite the two. In both cases the diegetic context involves an elderly relative relating the intradiegetic story to young members of the family. With *The Princess Bride* this is the grandfather (Peter Falk) reading the story to his grandson (Fred Savage); in *Mason & Dixon* it is Wicks Cherrycoke extemporising his narrative for the benefit of his nephews, niece and other assorted members of the LeSpark household. Furthermore, the diegetic distinction in the film is achieved by the unambiguous ontological differences between the diegetic and intradiegetic worlds, the former being strictly realist, set in a recognisable contemporary context, the latter being fantastical and otherworldly. Similarly, in *Mason & Dixon* the diegetic setting conforms to the realist tradition while the intradiegetic story is susceptible to a huge range of irrealist incursions, a trend that is announced early on by the appearance of the Learned English Dog in

chapter three.<sup>27</sup> From the point of view of Cherrycoke's younger audience, also, although the events Cherrycoke recounts begin only twenty six years earlier, they are at a significant psychological remove from the world they know, involving foreign lands and pre-revolutionary America, "[w]ith Indians in it, and Frenchmen" (6), as Pliny hopes, an unimaginable time and landscape of danger and adventure from the opulent perspective of luxury and indulgence that is the Philadelphian LeSpark household of 1786. I am not going so far as to claim that there is a *direct* influence of *The Princess Bride* on *Mason & Dixon*, which would be unnecessarily tenuous; rather, this film is emblematic of a *type* that, we can see, shares with the novel recognisable features in respect to the construction and demarcation of diegetic situations. What is of more interest for my purposes here, though, is the way *Mason & Dixon* manages the relationship between these diegetic levels, in its literary context, in a manner that draws heavily upon the widespread techniques in film and television of which *The Princess Bride* is but one of numerous examples.

Thus, in the ocular media the diegetic shift occurs traditionally as the narrator begins his story; the scene changes from the diegetic context to the metadiegetic, and the narrator's voice is silenced as the events and dialogue of the interior story begin to be played out in the accustomed manner of the screen. This is the point at which, as I have discussed, the narrator loses absolute ownership of the events *as we see them*, which are implicitly represented as the listener's, or *a* listener's, or possibly the narrator's, imaginative visualisation of those events; they are, whatever the case, a *representation* of the narrator's discourse. The scene may, at times, shift back to the diegetic context to represent action there, or the voices of the diegetic characters may be heard over the action of the metadiegetic scenes. Likewise, the narrator's voice-over may return at specific moments to provide commentary on events in the metadiegetic context. With these basic

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<sup>27</sup> In the closing passages of the novel these worlds do, however, begin to interact, which I will be discussing later in this thesis.



mechanics of the screen paradigm in mind, then, we can turn to the novel under consideration and examine how they are manifested in this new (literary) context.

### The Shift to Portsmouth

We can begin an analysis of *Mason & Dixon*'s emulation of framing techniques on screen by turning to the opening passages of chapter three, from where we will turn back to the first chapter for a discussion of what this implies in terms of the novel's narrating voice. Chapter three sees the beginning of Cherrycoke's narrative proper, after his introductory remarks towards the end of chapter one. In contrast to those earlier comments, the focus here is on Mason and Dixon, rather than on Cherrycoke himself, and he begins, appropriately for a story of these two, with their first meeting at Portsmouth just prior to their fateful embarkation on the *Seahorse*. In the final passage of chapter one, to which I shall return shortly, Cherrycoke's speech is rendered on the page without the quotation marks that, until that point, are present in all the characters' dialogue in the accustomed typography of the modern novel. This is also the case as we begin chapter three, but the pronoun that begins the passage clearly indicates Cherrycoke as the speaker. The image of verbal narration is also maintained by the past tense used here, which accords with the rendering of all Cherrycoke's reminiscences to date, as well as with natural verbal practice. Cherrycoke is briefly interrupted by an outburst by Pitt and Pliny, rendered in parentheses *with* quotation marks, before he responds to them with a piece of casual moral instruction and continues his story.

Here, at the fourth paragraph of the chapter, we witness Cherrycoke's voice merging into that of the primary narrator of the novel. The first word, "Howsobeit," *sounds* like Cherrycoke<sup>28</sup> and appears to function for him as something like a throat-clearing utterance, indicating an end to his ramblings

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<sup>28</sup> In fact, "Howsobeit" is used only once more in the novel, by Emerson (500); "Howbeit" is used more frequently, though by characters (especially Cherrycoke) more than by the primary narrator.

and an affirmative beginning to his story. From here, however, the one-sentence paragraph takes on features that distinguish it from Cherrycoke and identify it with the primary narrator. Through the mediation of the present perfect tense, in “have they met,” the narration moves into the present simple tense, in “Mason finds,” which characterises the greater part of the novel. We also find here the self-conscious play with language that marks the narrating figure, who maintains throughout the novel the inherently and inescapably anachronistic procedure of appropriating the semblance of eighteenth-century prose from a manifestly twentieth-century consciousness and point of view. Thus, in the single sentence we encounter the seeming anachronism of Mason’s pretensions being described as his “coming the old London Hand,”<sup>29</sup> along with the historical use of “Stupefaction” to mean consternation or astonishment, as opposed to its more common meaning of torpor.<sup>30</sup> This kind of self-consciousness of language production, its literariness, which we find in the narration of the novel, is distinctly absent from Cherrycoke’s, and other characters’, quoted speech, which, while also rendered in pseudo-archaic prose, retains, as it must, the air of sincerity and denotative intent that bespeaks a primarily social, rather than literary, underlying intent.<sup>31</sup> While Conrad’s Marlow narratives are remarkable for their rendering of a voice that manifests simultaneously the qualities of both oral and literary narration, in *Mason & Dixon* this is not Pynchon’s intent. Rather, an important feature of the novel’s narration is its thoroughgoing privileging of its *written* status, and the internal tensions this gives rise to within this ostensibly oral narration become fruitful loci for the novel’s expressive capabilities.

Indeed, as I am arguing here, the initial impetus for Pynchon’s establishment of his narrating voice involves a double translation: he takes on,

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<sup>29</sup> We can recall, for example, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the phrase “old Africa hands.” Pynchon, GR 316.

<sup>30</sup> OED, Definition 2.

<sup>31</sup> Even when characters’ speech does involve an anachronism or other such nod to the modern reader, it is necessary that we absolve that character from involvement in the joke; they are, that is, innocent of participation in a language game that is going on “over their head.”

that is, the established screen technique for rendering in that medium a putative oral narration, and then translates this translation into the language of the novel. If we follow, then, the passage we are examining from the moment when Cherrycoke's voice merges with that of the primary narrator, this is immediately followed by Dixon's speaking to Mason in Portsmouth. The scene, in other words, has changed, in the manner of film, from the diegetic to the metadiegetic, through the mediation of Cherrycoke's "voice-over" narration. This is where the complexity of the narrative situation, however, becomes apparent because, as I have said, Cherrycoke's oral narration is silenced, in the manner of film, to be overtaken by the novel's equivalent of a visual presentation, on screen as it were, of the new scene. Whereas in film or television this change is unproblematic for the audience because the two modes of representation, the oral and the visual, are immediately apparent and distinct, on the page they must be represented through a single medium, the written word, and the reader is required to be sensitive to the changing voice of the narration and what this implies. As I have said, the narration does not act like a camera lens, providing detailed physical description; rather, the reader's work involves an imaginative visualisation of the scene, with the narrator providing only such information as he deems necessary for the success of this undertaking.

Thus, as the scene establishes itself in Portsmouth, we immediately encounter a dialogue, of five speeches, between Dixon and Mason, which goes entirely unnarrated: neither speaker is designated, nor are their actions, reactions or appearances described; the reader must identify the speakers through their voices alone and follow the content and tenor of the conversation by careful attention solely to its text.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, then, the novel's rendering of screen narrative into prose is not an attempt to emulate the substantive features of the former, with its saturation of visual information, but, contrarily, to all but ignore such features, which are left to the reader's

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<sup>32</sup> Readers have already been alerted to the speech patterns of the two characters, albeit briefly, in the short section of narrated dialogue in chapter two.

imagination, and to produce a literary text that refigures, in respect to its own formal properties and traditions, the loosening of narrative ownership that the visual nature of the screen imparts of necessity upon the stories it purveys. In such metadiegetic cases as I have discussed in respect to film, this loosening is manifested most clearly for the audience in their awareness that the supposed narrator of the story could not possibly be providing all the detail that is present in the camera shot – the presence of a tree, the colour of a sunset, a certain facial expression, a particular set of clothes. As Pynchon reworks this screen technique back into the visually bereft medium of (now written rather than oral) language, his narrator equally relinquishes the obligation to provide such information.

### **The Narrator**

The literary nature of the narration is apparent if we examine this narrated passage, which follows the opening exchange between the protagonists near the beginning of chapter three:

Mason explains, though without his precise reason for it, that, for the past Year or more, it has been his practice to attend the Friday Hangings at that melancholy place, where he was soon chatting up Hangmen and their 'Prentices, whilst standing them pints at their Local, The Bridport Dagger, acquiring thus a certain grisly intimacy with the Art. Mason has been shov'd about and borne along in riots of sailors attempting to wrest from bands of Medical Students the bodies of Shipmates come to grief ashore, too far from the safety of the Sea, – and he's had his Purse, as his Person, assaulted by Agents public and private, – yet, "There's nothing like it, it's London at its purest," he cries. "You must come out there with me, soon as we may." (15)

The functions and techniques of this paragraph are thoroughly in keeping with those of the "omniscient" narrator as we know him today: it is in part summary of Mason's speech to Dixon, although the narrator also alludes to further knowledge of Mason's "precise reason" (which will later be revealed as being "expressly to chat up women" (110)). From "where he was," also, the passage takes on the air of narrating information more or less independently of what Mason may actually tell Dixon in the speech we are not privy to, but by returning to Mason's quoted words at the end of the passage the dual

functions of speech summary and independent narration are seamlessly married, giving the passage balance and coherence within the context of an irresolvable ambiguity.

Such poise and control, a kind of virtuosity in prose, is characteristic of this narrator and is traditionally what the narrator of a modern novel aspires to:<sup>33</sup> he is a master of that foundation block of written English, the completed, balanced, coherent, self-contained and grammatically pure sentence, which spoken language gestures towards yet seldom achieves. This is where the narrator contrasts most markedly with Cherrycoke's quoted voice, or, as in the opening sentences of chapter three, where, while devoid of quotation marks, the text is deictically identified as Cherrycoke's, which, as is also traditional to characters' speech in the modern novel, and is found in Marlow's narration, is *more* literary than actual living speech but nonetheless contains a *spokenness* to it, a manner of implying, in unrealistically articulate language, the struggle in speech between the impetus of the mind and the constraints, compulsions and autonomy of language. Cherrycoke's quoted speech tends to run on, to pile upon itself because, as for all speakers, he can never be sure precisely where his utterance will end. The written sentence, by contrast, as it is exemplified by *Mason & Dixon's* narrator, knows itself before it begins and thus constructs itself with the pleasing symmetry and rhetorical expressiveness that we enjoy in prose.

By this point in the putatively metadiegetic story it must be clear to any competent reader that Cherrycoke's speaking voice is essentially absent from the narration, just as Marlow's is essentially present in the Conrad stories that he tells. If this narration were to be read as a transcription of Cherrycoke's speech in the manner of Conrad's work, we would not only have to reconcile this apparent absence, but we would also have to accept his performing the preceding dialogue, with the appropriate accents to indicate the speaker and

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<sup>33</sup> Although to an extent modernists and postmodernists have made a stance of distrusting the rhetorical power of prose and have pursued a different kind of virtuosity, built on fracturing and fragmentation.

with no recourse to such supplementary narrating tools as “Dixon says” or “Mason replies,” and we would need to accustom ourselves to the idea of this eighteenth-century story teller moving into the present simple tense for almost the entirety of his narration. Finally, we would be required to accept the highly unusual fact that the narrating voice of the metadiegetic story, which apparently emanates from Cherrycoke, is identical with the narrating voice of the diegetic story, from which Cherrycoke himself emanates. While this character may conceivably be responsible for the one, it becomes deeply paradoxical for him to be responsible for the other.

The identity between the narrating voice of the metadiegetic sequences (which we have just examined) and that of the diegetic sequences is evident if we turn now to the opening chapter of the novel. As Peter J. Rabinowitz argues,<sup>34</sup> the opening sentence of a novel is one privileged location for readers’ conceptualisation of the novel’s strategies for creating meaningfulness. The opening sentence of *Mason & Dixon*, then, performs the same progression that we encountered in its emergence in chapter three, from the present perfect tense into the present simple – with a protracted use of the passive voice, which further eases the transition, meaning an active, present simple verb does not appear until “proceed” near the end of the sentence:

Snow-Balls have flown their Arcs, starr’d the Sides of Outbuildings, as of Cousins, carried Hats away into the brisk Wind off Delaware, – the Sleds are brought in and their Runners carefully dried and greased, shoes deposited in the back Hall, a stocking’d-foot Descent made upon the great Kitchen, in a purposeful Dither since Morning, punctuated by the ringing Lids of various Boilers and Stewing-Pots, fragrant with Pie-Spices, peel’d Fruits, Suet, heated Sugar, – the Children, having all upon the Fly, among rhythmic slaps of Batter and Spoon, coax’d and stolen what they might, proceed, as upon each afternoon all this snowy Advent, to a comfortable Room at the rear of the House, years since given over to their carefree Assaults. (5)

The immediacy of the present tense, which predominates from this point, bespeaks, as I have said, the possibility of a pervasive film-inspired aesthetic, although, as I have also indicated, the crudity of this technique is

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<sup>34</sup> Rabinowitz 58 ff.

overshadowed in *Mason & Dixon* by the development of a highly literary narration. In this privileged, opening-sentence position, however, the evocation of the screen is particularly apparent, not simply in terms of tense, but in respect to the unfolding of images of the children's activity, which can easily be read as depicting the preliminary sequences of a film (during the opening credits perhaps): the children are followed in a succession of shots from their outside play, into the house, down into the kitchen and then to the room "at the rear of the House" where the action of the diegetic passages is to take place.<sup>35</sup>

### Cherrycoke vs. The Narrator

Remaining in chapter one, we can see the contrast between Cherrycoke's speaking voice, as he warms up to his story, with the narrating voice, which goes on to provide some intimate information about this character:

"It's twenty years," recalls the Rev<sup>d</sup>, "since we all topped the Allegheny Ridge together, and stood looking out at the Ohio Country, — so fair, a Revelation, meadow'd to the Horizon — Mason and Dixon, and all the McCleans, Darby and Cope, no, Darby wouldn't've been there in 'sixty-six, — howbeit, old Mr. Barnes and young Tom Hynes, the rascal...don't know where they all went, — some fought in the war, some chose peace come what might, some profited, some lost everything. Some are gone to Kentucky, and some, — as now poor Mason, — to Dust.

"'Twas not too many years before the War, — what we were doing out in that Country together was brave, scientifick beyond my understanding, and ultimately meaningless, — we were putting a line straight through the heart of the Wilderness, eight yards wide and due west, in order to separate two Proprietorships, granted when the World was yet feudal and but eight years later to be nullified by the War for Independence."

And now Mason's gone, and the Rev<sup>d</sup> Cherrycoke, who came to town only to pay his Respects, has linger'd, thro' the first descent of cold, the first drawings-in to the Hearth-Side, the first Harvest-Season meals appearing upon the next-best Dishes. He had intended to be gone weeks ago, but finds he cannot detach. Each day among his Devoirs is a visit, however brief, to Mason's grave. The Verger has taken to nodding at him. In the middle of the

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<sup>35</sup> We can note that the screen-like emphasis on action in this first sentence is not maintained, however, and that the literary nature of the narration comes to the fore in the following sentence, which involves prolonged description, not only of the appearance of things but of their history as well — information that is not easily given in the medium of the screen. Again, the narrative voice arises out of an emulation of cinematic techniques, but it is not bound to the demands of this practice.

night recently he awoke convinc'd that 'twas he who had been haunting  
Mason, — that like a shade with a grievance, he expected Mason, but newly  
arriv'd at Death, to help him with something. (7-8)

Cherrycoke's *presence* within his quoted speech — the personal pronouns, the personal values and emotions, the conversational rhythm and tone — is clearly, and at this point unsurprisingly, absent from the narrator, who in this diegetic context is playing the appropriate role of the extra-heterodiegetic, "omniscient" figure we would expect to find in the opening pages of a novel. It is only when we find the same voice narrating what is supposedly Cherrycoke's metadiegetic story in chapter three that the issue of narrating identity comes to the fore. In the narrative passage just quoted, only the first phrase is in the present tense because the remainder of the passage refers to the recent past leading up to the current scene in the LeSpark household. Generally, however, as we found in the opening sentence, the primary narrator, in his narration of the diegetic events, speaks in the same present tense as he does when narrating "Cherrycoke's" metadiegetic story.

Furthermore, the ironic historical consciousness that spans the late eighteenth century through to the late twentieth century, which I previously mentioned apropos the metadiegetic passages, is also found with the narration of the diegetic context. When Cherrycoke mentions, in the quoted passage, that the Mason-Dixon line was "nullified by the War for Independence" he speaks innocently, without awareness that for later generations the significance of the line is yet to be announced. However, two pages earlier the narrator announces, quite self-consciously, that "the Times are as impossible to calculate, this Advent, as the Distance to a Star" (6). This is just one of multiple examples throughout the novel of the narrator conceiving of a possible idea, figure of speech, image or assumption that would be resonant in the eighteenth century but not today, having been nullified by the intervening advance of knowledge. In the case of Cherrycoke's comment, the irony lies outside the speaking consciousness; in the case of the narrator's it is a constituent part of that consciousness, and this



is the case throughout the novel, be the context diegetic, metadiegetic or meta-metadiegetic.

### **A Diegetic Transition Examined**

The novel's narrative mechanics, which reference the movement from a diegetic to a metadiegetic context in film, first begin to appear not, in fact, in the chapter three passage that I have discussed above, but at the close of the first chapter, where Cherrycoke's voice is rendered as a voice-over as he introduces his tale with the story of how he came to embark on the *Seahorse* with Mason and Dixon. These moments, the end of chapter one and the beginning of chapter three, are critical to the novel's referencing of screen traditions because it is at these points that the movement from the diegetic to the metadiegetic context is first indicated and where the novel attempts to emulate the manner by which, on screen, the former fades into the latter – but to do this through a seamless verbal representation. That is, the novel cannot afford, for the sake of the radically underdetermined identity of its ubiquitous narrator, to “manage” this transition in any overt way: that is, because the fundamental signifying feature of the narrator is his ubiquitous presence across all diegetic levels, because he resists accruing a hierarchical relation to those levels, he cannot, at this critical point of transition, step outside himself and assume an exterior position from which to articulate a process in which he is inescapably immersed.

The passage under discussion follows from a dialogue between Cherrycoke, the children and Uncle Ives, which is conducted by the narrator in a traditional manner, with speakers designated as necessary and their words contained in quotation marks. After a line break, however, Cherrycoke's voice resumes his narrative, as at the beginning of chapter three, in the past tense but without quotation marks. Here the narrator's voice is marked off from Cherrycoke's by parentheses, establishing for the reader that it is indeed still Cherrycoke speaking but alerting us to a formal change in the typographical and thus narratorial presentation. The passage begins, then:

Tho' my Inclination had been to go out aboard an East Indiaman (the Rev<sup>d</sup> continues), as that route East travers'd notoriously a lively and youthful World of shipboard Dalliance, Galeforce Assemblies, and Duels ashore, with the French Fleet a constant,— for some, Romantic,— danger, "Like Pirates, yet more polite," as the Ladies often assur'd me,— alas, those who controll'd my Fate, getting wind of my preference at the last moment, swiftly arrang'd to have me transferr'd into a small British Frigate sailing alone, upon a long voyage, in a time of War,— the Seahorse, twenty-four guns, Captain Smith. I hasten'd in to Leadenhall Street to inquire. (10)

The dialogue the young Cherrycoke enters into at Leadenhall Street at the end of this paragraph resembles that which we found between Mason and Dixon at the beginning of chapter three, with only the single piece of narrated information, "I was greeted," after Cherrycoke's anonymous interlocutor's initial utterance, from where the dialogue progresses, with no further word from the narrating Cherrycoke:

"Can this be Objection we hear?" I was greeted. "Are you saying that a sixth-rate is beneath you? Would you prefer to remain ashore, and take up quarters in Bedlam? It has made a man of many in your Situation. Some have come to enjoy fairly meaningful lives there. Or if it's some need for the Exotic, we might arrange for a stay in one of the French Hospitals...."

"Would one of my Condition even know how to object, my Lord? I owe you everything."

"Madness has not impair'd your memory. Good. Keep away from harmful Substances, in particular Coffee, Tobacco and Indian Hemp. If you must use the latter, do not inhale. Keep your memory working, young man! Have a safe Voyage."

At the conclusion of this dialogue, Cherrycoke's voice returns, again without quotation marks, describing, in the enticing tone of a prologue's denouement, his boarding the *Seahorse* and his hopes for enlightenment in the East, with, however, a hint towards the eventual thwarting of these hopes as the *Seahorse* is attacked by the French frigate, *l'Grande*:

So, with this no doubt well-meant advice finding its way into the mid-watch sounds of waves past my sleeping-place, I set sail upon an Engine of Destruction, in the hope that Eastward yet might dwell something of Peace and Godhead, which British Civilization, in venturing Westward, had left behind,— and thus was consternation the least of my feelings when, instead of supernatural Guidance from Lamas old as time, here came Jean Crapaud a-looming,— thirty-four guns' worth of Disaster, and only one Lesson. (11)

From the point of view of my argument here, it seems necessary that the reader account in some way for the overtly uncommon textual features that draw our attention to the novel's eschewal of the traditional paradigm of extradiegetic, intradiegetic and metadiegetic voices that would, if the novel were written in the Conradian style, provide a clear framework for the reader's mental conceptualization of diegetic levels within the novel. My dissatisfaction with Duyfhuizen's argument, with which I began this discussion, derives from his failure to recognise this eschewal, and the unambiguous textual features that draw attention to it, and to construct his argument based on an imposition of Genette's diegetic categories in a context where, it seems to me, they simply do not apply. The reading that I am giving to the revelation of the novel's narrating voice in its early chapters, based on the screen paradigm that I have outlined, may appear both didactic and arbitrary, an imaginative construct of my own that I am imposing on the novel. After all, there is nowhere a direct instruction from an "authority," such as Pynchon himself, that indicates that my approach is correct.<sup>36</sup> However, as I indicated above, this is essential to the success of the novel's project: the *point* is that no narrating voice is able to step back from the narrating act and "explain" or contextualise that act, because the nature of the act itself precisely rejects that possibility.

## Reading the Screen (I)

Having outlined my conception of these unmanaged narrating transitions, then, I would like to return to the passage I have been discussing, the closing paragraphs of chapter one, and elaborate on how that might be read in terms of my argument; how, that is, my argument can account for the textual features that I have discussed – Cherrycoke's voice as suddenly devoid of quotation marks, the narrator's voice in parentheses, and virtually unnarrated dialogue. These sudden changes in typography undeniably suggest a shift of

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<sup>36</sup> I am thinking, for example, of the sprocket holes at the beginning of each passage of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which Pynchon's publishers suggested as a feature of the typography to indicate the "filmic" bias of that narrative.

some kind in the intended manner of representation, which my screen paradigm accounts for. While in the passage leading up to this moment the LeSpark family is “in shot” and their speech is rendered in the quotation marks we would expect to find, with the typographical change we can infer a concomitant “scene change,” which depicts the younger Cherrycoke in London twenty-six years earlier, at the time to which his narrating voice is referring. The voice of the primary narrator, during this transition, still belongs to the scene in Philadelphia, and this “absence” from the new scene is conveyed by his voice being enclosed parenthetically. Cherrycoke’s voice is here providing a voice-over narration of a scene that is not in itself described for us, given that this function belongs to the primary narrator, who is unable to speak at the same time as Cherrycoke. That is, while in an actual film, the oral voice-over co-exists alongside the visual presentation of the new scene, here the two functions are performed by a single medium of communication – written language – the former by Cherrycoke’s words and the latter by those of the primary narrator, but the two cannot, clearly, act concurrently.

As I will be reiterating throughout my discussion of the novel’s narrative, the literary content, *which we read*, is (unsurprisingly) more prominent and significant than the imagined visual scene to which it refers, with (and I cannot emphasise this enough) its formal indebtedness to screen techniques acting ultimately as little more than a catalyst for the signifying potential of the novel’s primary narrator. This is particularly the case here, where there is virtually no denotative cue as to how the given scene might be visualised. That said, however, a non-binding, subjective account of such a scene can point to the way in which the novel’s formal processes here *are* referencing the screen. Throughout the first paragraph of Cherrycoke’s voice-over we can imagine a montage of shots describing Cherrycoke’s conception of life aboard an East Indiaman as his narrative relates it; we can picture one of “the Ladies” delivering the “Like Pirates, yet more polite” line to a nervous young Cherrycoke while her friends nod in agreement (or possibly we may

only see her lips moving while Cherrycoke's voice-over is heard quoting her,<sup>37</sup> or perhaps their voices may be heard simultaneously); next we see Cherrycoke alone in his rooms, opening and reading the letter informing him of the transfer to the *Seahorse*; and in the next shot he is outdoors, "hasten[ing] in to Leadenhall Street to inquire."

At this point, the case for the passage being rendered as a visual scene becomes more compelling because, as throughout the novel, the dialogue is all but non-narrated, and the idea of Cherrycoke simply performing the conversation for his audience, without designating the speakers or describing their appearances, attitudes or his own feelings, seems plainly inaccurate. In other words, I am suggesting that Cherrycoke's voice-over ends with the phrase "I was greeted," and, indeed, we might imagine the opening question, "Can this be Objection we hear?" being, as with the case above, presented as narratage, or, again, the two voices might be mutually audible. From this point, however, the dialogue resembles those that are found throughout the novel: where speakers are identified only if it is necessary for clarity, or if an accompanying action or gesture is to be described; where the narrator allows speakers to discourse long and uninterrupted; where, that is, the reader is called upon to *actively* picture the scene, using their free imagination, while the dialogue plays out, before their eyes as it were, with its nuances merely implied by the context, the content and *sound* of the language, and its punctuation.<sup>38</sup>

Cherrycoke's narrating absence during this dialogue is further evidenced by the content of its final speech. As I said earlier, speaking characters in the novel are innocent of their involvement in the present-day consciousness responsible for anachronistic humour, implying a presence *behind* their words (the implied author's, perhaps) who sets up their

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<sup>37</sup> This technique is called "narratage." Turim 110.

<sup>38</sup> This latter effect is evidenced, for example, by the ellipsis that follows the first speaker's offer to Cherrycoke that "[w]e might arrange for a stay in one of the French Hospitals...." We can imagine here a sardonic lilt to the voice on the phrase "the French Hospitals," along with a raised eyebrow, a knowing look and a supercilious, expectant pause, all indicated by the trailing off that the ellipsis suggests.

inadvertent referencing of late twentieth-century cultural icons. This careful disbursement of knowledge would be threatened, were Cherrycoke considered the controlling narrator of this dialogue, when the speaker advises the young Cherrycoke, apropos “Indian Hemp”: “If you must use [it], do not inhale.” The joke here, referring to Bill Clinton’s famous semantics, is between the novel and the reader, and is possible only because Cherrycoke’s voice-over narration, as we found at the beginning of chapter three, has been silenced by the presentation of the scene itself, a presentation that no longer *belongs* to Cherrycoke, but belongs instead to the consciousness of the novel, which, as with metadiegetic film scenes that are ostensibly narrated by a diegetic character, is not bound (indeed *cannot be bound*) to relate the oral narrative that lies behind it, but is rather freed to pursue its own artistic ends in a parallel but independent rendering of the story.

My reading of the passage, then, posits the scene that is envisioned as, not the LeSpark household of the preceding pages, but a succession of images from the time that Cherrycoke is describing with his voice-over narration. This voice-over is then silenced as the scene becomes Leadenhall Street, and the speakers, the younger Cherrycoke and an unnamed interlocutor, carry out the dialogue, *in their own voices*, independently of the older Cherrycoke, who, in a world beyond the text, continues his telling of the story, relating something like the same information in a formally and substantively different manner. His voice-over *returns*, however, in the final paragraph, when he describes his thoughts as he beds down for his first night on the *Seahorse* and then anticipates for his audience the sea battle that he, along with Mason and Dixon, will experience when their vessel encounters the *l’Grande*.<sup>39</sup> Again, we can easily imagine the scene as it would be rendered on the screen: while the older man’s voice is heard narrating, we see the younger Cherrycoke lying on his bunk, pensive, as the ship rolls and the waves crash; then, on “here came,” with the music rising in an ominous key, we see an image of the French ship,

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<sup>39</sup> Cherrycoke refers to the vessel as “Jean Crapeaud,” a term for a Frenchman dating back as far as the seventeenth century.

coursing through the dark oceans, massive, imposing, and bent on destruction.

Here, also, we find Cherrycoke's voice innocent of its significance to the novel's intentions when he describes his hopes for revelation in the East. Without his awareness of it, the novel figures Cherrycoke as a symbol of the conscience of the West, which, through the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, has looked increasingly (with varying degrees of authenticity and commitment) to Eastern medicines, philosophies and religious practices, to fill the perceived lacunae of its own cultural and epistemological biases, forged in large part throughout the Age of Reason from which Cherrycoke speaks.<sup>40</sup> Cherrycoke's own ignorance of the double meaning here is evident in the earnestness of his desires, which spring exclusively from a Christian, rather than secular, motivation: he is seeking a *return* to "Peace and Godhead," in opposition to secularism and imperialist, capitalist expansion, which remain, arguably, the enabling cornerstones of the West's "orientalist" sentimentalising of the East today.

The extra-textual features that I am elaborating here are clearly not denotatively signified by the narrative itself and are, therefore, no more than imaginative interpretations. These imaginings of how the scene might be visualised remain solely *my* interpretations, with no claim to any kind of authenticity beyond the subjective. This difficulty, however, is beside the point. In fact, the imaginary visual renderings of these scenes that I am presenting are a self-conscious exercise in over-reading, which, however, it seems necessary for me to indulge in for the sake of illustrating my conception of the narrative's formal mechanics and the manner of good faith reading that these invite. In other words, the point I am making here is primarily concerned with the *formal* elements of the text and the way in which the screen techniques that it references enable a new conception of the narrator's role, which is freed from the hegemony of a singular, humanist

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of this, see Joseph Dewey, "The Sound of One Man Mapping: Wicks Cherrycoke and the Easter (Re)Solution." Horvath and Malin 112-31.

subjectivity. My over-reading of the content of the novel at this point is aimed at articulating the way in which this form references the screen, but it is a heuristic that is not necessary once my argument has been established.

Indeed, my creative imagining of the scenes accompanying Cherrycoke's voice-over narration are necessarily tenuous because, as I have said, the primary narrator of the novel cannot speak simultaneously with Cherrycoke and, hence, for these brief passages in the novel, Pynchon's narrative system is structurally weak – because the primary narrator cannot fully control the shifting scene while the floor is being held by Cherrycoke's speaking voice. My imaginative reconstruction of the scene *as* film, then, is a procedure that is not strictly necessary either here or, more emphatically, throughout the bulk of the novel. This is because there is no requirement that the reader actually actively visualise what they read as a screen presentation; rather, as we would expect, readers naturally visualise – in their own idiosyncratic manners – the events of the narrative, as they would reading any other novel. The importance of the screen technologies that are evoked in these opening chapters abides rather in two underlying respects: firstly, as I am demonstrating here, they rationalise a narrating voice that, unfamiliarly, moves fluidly among putative diegetic levels; and secondly, as I shall discuss further in the following chapters, this fluidity, informed by a generally pervasive (but by no means totalising) screen aesthetic, informs the narrator's signifying potential, which is not bound by the voice-as-singular-subject conception that inheres within traditional novelistic realism.

The plausibility of my imaginative visualisations of the scenes above, that they accord with the wider picture I am building, is the basis of their relevance: it forms a part, that is, of my elucidation of what I see as an underlying signifying structure to these early chapters that can only be accessed intuitively and can only be described convincingly, as I am attempting, with a thorough description such as this, which is persuasive inasmuch as it is consistent and internally coherent. The greatest test of this description, however, which my argument is in the process of undertaking, is



whether it can offer an interpretive paradigm for reading the novel, as literature and not film, which accounts for and makes sense of its narrative features in terms of a reading that does not impose “imaginative visualisations.” In other words, from the point of view of novelistic tradition (upon which meaningfulness in any novel is contingent), the enigmas of *Mason & Dixon*’s narration that I have discussed – the narrating voice that does not respect diegetic levels; the disappearance of Cherrycoke’s narrating voice; and the typographical anomalies such as inconsistent quotation marks and parenthetical intrusions – simply *do not make sense*. The reading I am giving here proposes in the novel an unspoken engagement with screen traditions that, as I will show, underscores a reworking of novelistic tradition that, when approached in the manner I am suggesting, becomes meaningful in a way that constitutes an evolution, rather than rejection, of that tradition.

## Reading the Screen (II)

As I have suggested, there is a difficulty for the narration of *Mason & Dixon* when it comes to managing the transition between diegetic levels. This is because the inherently ambiguous identity of the narrator rests on his not assuming a controlling role in respect to the movement between these levels. The inspiration the novel takes from screen techniques is more a method for achieving this transition effectively, without implicating the narrator as an agent of transition, than it is a pervasive code for understanding *Mason & Dixon*. Its relevance to this reading, then, is far greater when discussing these early chapters than it is for the bulk of the novel. The early part of chapter one, as we have seen, is unproblematic from a narrative point of view because we are operating at a single diegetic level in which the narrator and characters perform much as we might expect: while the narration is predominantly in the present tense, the quoted words of characters are in whichever tense seems most natural and appropriate to their speech; there are clear indications, when necessary, as to which character is speaking in any situation, and the narrator provides such information on events as seems

appropriate. The change from this traditional arrangement that occurs at the end of the first chapter indicates a non-traditional narrative convention coming into focus. Cherrycoke's words, while still his, are no longer in quotation marks because *he* is no longer present on the scene, which (we must imagine) has faded into that which he is describing, London 1760/1, while he remains "out of shot" in Philadelphia. Likewise, the voice of the narrator – still the extradiegetic narrator of the diegetic scene that is no longer "in shot" – is therefore contained within parentheses, suggesting a voice issuing from that "out-of-shot" context. Finally, the non-narrated dialogue in the middle of the passage indicates that all dialogue throughout the novel can be read as "in shot" – that is, immediate, given, present, without needing to be conveyed and supplemented by a subjective story-telling agency. Cherrycoke's voice-over narrative has provided a lead-in to this scene, then, but his voice is not required to narrate a dialogue whose protagonists are present and able to speak for themselves.

At the beginning of chapter three, Pynchon takes the further step, which he avoids in the chapter one passage, of introducing the primary narrator's voice into the metadiegetic context. As with the chapter one example, the chapter begins with Cherrycoke's voice from his position "out of shot," delivered, that is, as a voice-over without quotation marks. The interruption by the twins *is* rendered in quotation marks and, like the narrator's voice at the end of chapter one, inside parentheses. These parentheses indicate, as before, a momentary intrusion by the diegetic scene, where the twins are present and their words, therefore, are given as quoted speech. From here, as we have seen, the narrating system does not simply cut from Cherrycoke's voice-over narration to the scene he introduces, in the manner of the earlier passage, but rather we witness the more complex action of Cherrycoke's voice merging into that of the primary narrator, losing its conversational rhythms and adopting the present tense that predominates throughout the novel.

This is the most challenging moment for Pynchon's formal mechanics, because, for the sake of the narrating fluidity of the novel, which I will examine in the following chapter, the narrator must be introduced here without, as it were, a formal introduction. What is unproblematic in film, the screen's overtaking of the narrated story, must here be achieved through the single medium of narrated language, drawing our attention to the narrator's ability (in his ubiquity) to incorporate others' voices, with Cherrycoke's as the critical, enabling instance of this possibility. To do this, then, the narrator, finding again his voice which opens the novel, subsumes Cherrycoke's voice within his own, asserting his control over the ensuing scene. Reviewing the sentence, we can see Cherrycoke's voice *becoming* the narrator's:

"Howsobeit, — scarcely have they met, in the Saloon of Mason's Inn at Portsmouth, than Mason finds himself coming the Old London Hand, before Dixon's clear Stupefaction with that Town." This refers us to the complex relationship between Cherrycoke's voice and consciousness, and that of the primary narrator, a partial, ambiguous amalgam, which I will be discussing in greater detail in the following chapter. Certainly it alerts us to the fundamental fracturing that exists in terms of the identity that we might ascribe to this narrator, to the multiplicity of subjective influences that underlie it, and to the fluid and various forms of their manifestations, which I will further uncover in the following chapter, and which constantly resist any absolute conceptualisation. That is, the line breaks, the parentheses, the absence or presence of quotation marks and the use of tense, all of which have been helpful in my discussion so far, are not employed rigorously throughout the novel in the manner we have found in the first and third chapter. Rather, subtle variations on these patterns constantly throw such conceptual structures into doubt, while the whole of the novel is held together by the ubiquitous, and infinitely multiple, narrating voice that belongs simultaneously everywhere and nowhere within the worlds it constructs.

This all-pervasive narrating voice, which in fact undermines the diegetic levels that I continue to refer to for clarity's sake, is established in the

first instance by the referencing of screen techniques that Pynchon achieves in the opening chapters of the novel. It would be pushing the envelope too far to claim that this referencing abides consistently throughout the novel, where, once established, the narration comes into its own as a literary device; and, indeed, such a claim would limit an appreciation of the variety of cultural influences and images that are called up by the narration. Rather, as the novel progresses, this screen-inspired image becomes merely one of many partial influences upon the way we read the narrative, but in the opening chapters it is critical in *justifying* Pynchon's choice of a narrating voice that disrespects traditional expectations of diegetic realism. Just as the screen is the common medium of transmission in film or television, undermining the autonomy of apparent diegetic levels, which in the Conradian novel are made unambiguous by the singular nature of individuated voices, this ubiquitous narrative voice in *Mason & Dixon* constitutes Pynchon's literary equivalent. While in *The Princess Bride* the grandfather's narrating voice is silenced and the screen (the same screen that brings us the diegetic scene) purveys the images that he ostensibly narrates, in *Mason & Dixon*'s opening passages Cherrycoke's voice is silenced and the same narrating voice that brought him to our awareness now narrates *for him* a re-imagined version of the story he tells.

### **The Narrator and the Screen: Review**

The difficulty for my exegesis here is that I am talking with a limited vocabulary in two respects: firstly, in terms of making a precarious analogy between two fundamentally different narrative forms (film and the novel); and secondly, in terms of the wholly unfamiliar diegetic practices in the narration of *Mason & Dixon*. This difficulty reflects the reader's encounter with the novel, where the immediate, and alienating, effect of the ubiquity across diegetic levels of its narrating voice lies in its destabilising of those levels more profoundly than we find on screen. While in the latter case the absence of voice means a sense of diegetic ownership needs to be imposed on

the substantive features of an metadiegetic passage, by way of a marked dissonance in respect to the diegetic situation, in *Mason & Dixon*, with its verbal medium, the presence of a narrating voice anticipates clear diegetic boundaries. This expectation is thrown into confusion, however, by this single voice crossing those boundaries. While as a medium of transmission the screen undermines the possibility of diegetic ownership inhering unambiguously within its formal properties (because as a form it cannot represent individual subjectivity in the way language can), *Mason & Dixon's* narrating equivalent, on the other hand, resuscitates such a possibility, thanks to its necessarily singular, subjective voice,<sup>41</sup> meaning its ubiquity now brings home in an absolute sense the diegetic paradox that the screen alludes to. Given that in the novel the different diegetic *situations* (if not voices) are clearly apparent, at least until chapter fifty three, this paradox is all the more unsettling: the tradition of the modern novel has created an expectation that such intentional diegetic situations will be complemented and demarcated by recognisably distinct extradiegetic, intradiegetic and metadiegetic voices, so when this latter element fails to appear, a revised reading sensibility is called for.

Of course, to an extent it might be argued that on the face of it this is not so revolutionary a move on Pynchon's part. Indeed, the same effect, surely, could be achieved by having the narrator set up the diegetic scene, introduce the story-telling situation and say, "This is the story that Cherrycoke tells the children...", continuing, in the same voice, to tell that story and then repeating the procedure for stories told by characters within that metadiegetic context. Such a simplified version of what actually takes place in *Mason & Dixon*, however, would fail to achieve the fundamentally destabilising construction of the narrating subject that is paramount to this novel's signifying potential. It would, that is, simply privilege the narrator in

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<sup>41</sup> It is necessary because its ubiquity can only be recognised as such given that its voice across the various diegetic situations is self-identical: the *voice* is the very quality that identifies the "extradiegetic" narrator as also the "metadiegetic" and "meta-metadiegetic" narrators.

his role as a recounter and summariser of others' narratives. The singular identity of that speaker would inhere in symbiosis with the singularity of his voice, and his subjective positioning would be accepted as the unambiguous grounding for its creation of narrative meaningfulness. Such a narrator would, that is, accumulate identity in a linear fashion through his construction of himself, in conjunction with the world-view he articulates in the story he tells, in the same manner as the traditional extra-heterodiegetic narrator throughout the history of the modern novel, to the discomfort of the modernist and postmodernist relativising sensibility.<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, *Mason & Dixon's* narrator, by way of his complex creation, which I am outlining here, while retaining a singularity of voice, is constantly (and by definition) denied a singularity of identity such as defines an individual subjectivity in a humanist sense. This constitutes a counter-intuitive answer to the paradoxical modernist quest for non-narrated narrative: *Mason & Dixon* is indeed heavily narrated, and this relies on a coherent and singular narrating voice; yet at the same time this putative narrator is fastidiously stripped of the singular subjectivity that would seem the natural corollary of its linguistically manifest haecceity. This stripping operation relies on more than simply creating a narrator who denies diegetic boundaries in the manner suggested above, because such a narrator in fact removes the possibility of those boundaries in his own self-definition as the single authority and voice conveying others' stories. Rather, the narration of *Mason & Dixon* simultaneously creates and undermines those boundaries by way of its formal debt to the tradition of diegetic demarcations on screen.

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<sup>42</sup> This kind of summarising narrator is actually found operating in *Vineland*, which enacts something of a dress rehearsal for *Mason & Dixon's* narrative form. When Prairie is looking at a picture of her mother and DL on the computer screen, the narrator takes the opportunity to move fluidly into *that* story. A similar thing occurs when DL tells of her meeting with Ralph Wayvone, with the narrator "taking on" her story for the reader, while she continues talking to Prairie out-of-shot; and the technique is used most compellingly in the build-up to the story of Frenesi's betrayal of the 24fps. (Pynchon, *Vineland* 114 ff; 130 ff; 188 ff.) The technique is powerful here in its representation of story-telling and interpretation, but the fluidity, because of the narrator's established extra-heterodiegetic position, does not approach what is achieved in *Mason & Dixon*.

A metadiegetic passage or narrated flashback on screen does not, as I have discussed, imply the narrator's presence unambiguously within the form of its representations in the way a narrator's voice does imply this in prose. Indeed, my distinguishing of the two modes – the narrated (metadiegetic) and the simple flashback – rests on this fact, with the images of the simple flashback cohering with those of the diegetic situation and thus being ontologically indistinct from it. This means, consequently, that the signifying of a genuinely metadiegetic passage relies on perceptible dissonance from the diegetic passages, which conveys to the viewer that this is not a simple flashback but is rather a visual and aural representation of, specifically, the diegetic character's narrative. The cause of this ambiguity lies in the nature of the representation – the immediate presentation of events on screen – which is at a distinct formal remove from the oral recounting of events that it purports to convey. Viewing any such sequence on screen, be it narrated (metadiegetic) or simple flashback, one is struck repeatedly by the necessary fact that what is being viewed *cannot* constitute an unrefracting window onto the oral narrative, but is rather a version of this that operates according to the traditions and requirements of screen. In the case of the simple flashback, this constitutes my definition of the mode, where the stylistic and epistemological harmony between the main story and the flashback alerts viewers to an unaltered representational system between the supposed diegetic levels; in the case of the narrated (metadiegetic) flashback, its status is evident in an enforced disharmony between these, which, while referencing the metadiegetic status of the sequence, does not in itself embody the oral narrative but rather points to the speaking character's ownership of these events and the fact that they enjoy a different provenance and ontology from the events of the main story. In each case, as well as for examples that may fall into the murky area between the two, the significant phenomenon for my purposes here is the fact that the mechanics of the form require viewers to accept a translation from one medium to another, which necessarily involves a radical transformation of communicative features.

This transformation involves the oral medium being rendered in the *already present* form of the screen, a complication that is often subdued by a fading or blurring effect at the moment of transition, which briefly undermines the hegemony of that form. This pervasiveness of the medium of representation is the critical feature of this screen technique that Pynchon picks up on in his emulation of it in the literary context of *Mason & Dixon*. The narrating voice of this novel occupies all diegetic levels in the manner of the screen, yet it belongs ultimately to none of them: while the diegetic situations it relates, that is, arise the one out of the other, this ubiquitous narrating voice is not subordinate to such contingency and thus effectively remains autonomous in respect to diegetic situation and remains, therefore, unanchored to any situational relationship to the events it recounts. The narrator does not *summarise* the metadiegetic and meta-metadiegetic passages from a privileged extradiegetic position; he does not, that is, direct a narrating gaze “inward” from the “outside,” voicing the metadiegetic sequences in terms of the diegetic and the meta-metadiegetic in terms of the metadiegetic. Rather, like the screen, this figure conveys a sense of being *already present* at any given point, and his cumulative coming into being is only linear to the extent that the form is necessarily so: this linearity defines the self-identity of the voice, but the ambiguous subject that lies behind this voice is infinitely multiple (because his ubiquity depends on his ability to incorporate another’s language into his own), and rather than accruing a single identity in the course of his narrating exposition, facets of this multiplicity are revealed in the various representational choices he makes throughout his narrative. This is how he conveys the *look* of the novel at any given point – by representing within his voice, and not stepping outside of himself to explain it, the subjective stance of a particular cultural discourse, ideology, or “manner of speaking.” To clarify this, it is necessary now that I articulate, in as precise a fashion as possible, how I conceive of the potentially endless plurality that is inscribed within the subjectivity of *Mason & Dixon*’s narrator.



## Chapter Three: The Underdetermined

The translation of a filmic presentational technique into novelistic narrative that I have articulated in the previous chapter involves in *Mason & Dixon* an inbuilt slippage between what Genette calls an intra-homodiegetic narrator and an extra-heterodiegetic narrator, whereby the one is unavoidably infected with the presence of the other, despite the two being, in Genette's words, "diametrically (diagonally) opposite."<sup>1</sup> This slippage brings into play a radical ambiguity of narrating identity that is coterminous with but also contingent upon the formal ambiguity by which it is achieved. At the same time, however, the consistency of the narrating voice throughout the novel implies a unified narrating subjectivity that is at constant odds (from a realist point of view) with this ambiguity. As I will argue in this chapter, this tension is ultimately resolved by the abandonment of identity-privilege in our reading strategies, recognising the narrator not as representing his specific subjectivity in any cumulative sense (his identity is radically underdetermined and thus free from the kind of asymptotic reaching towards revelation of subjectivity that we normally ascribe to a narrator), but as representing, self-consciously, the act of representation itself, whereby an unknowable other – the forever elusive "reality" that we, in perpetual bad faith, allow ourselves to believe lies behind the story as told, as well as behind the teller in his telling – is translated (and reduced) to comprehensibility within the confines of language and literary (reading) tradition. Ironically, however, this undermining of the humanist bias in the construction of speaking identities within the tradition of the novel can only operate as it does here by way of *Mason & Dixon's* foregrounding of the ongoing tension it establishes between a speaking

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<sup>1</sup> Genette, *ND* 248. Genette uses this term in referring to narrators, *C.*, in *Jean Santeuil* and Marcel in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the former intra-heterodiegetic and the latter extra-homodiegetic. Here we are dealing with the alternative diagonal, extra-hetero versus intra-homo, and, of course, we are dealing with their simultaneous presence in the same work, as opposed to their appearances in different novels.

subjectivity, on the one hand, and its irresolute verbal manifestation on the other.

Genette's narrating categories are useful in this argument because they operate along, and highlight, the schism between narrating identity as it is revealed (or not revealed) denotatively by the text – that is, as it is named (or not named) – and as it reveals itself through the action of its narrating. It is precisely in respect to these mutually dependent realms that *Mason & Dixon's* representational antics manifest their disruptions of traditional realist expectations and bring those expectations into revived focus. The textual incarnation of narrating subjectivity in respect to Genette's categories is determined by a dynamic relationship within each of the terms of the given category. That is, the subjectivity that is apprehended in the text of, say, an extradiegetic narrator depends on whether it is also a homo- or heterodiegetic narrator. In the former case, perceived subjectivity is necessarily caught up in the fact that the narrator is present both as teller and told, and this intimacy energises, on the most basic level, our view of the narrator and their relationship to what they narrate: it becomes unavoidable that the narrator's representations are tested most compellingly in the dialogue between their narrating and narrated selves. In the latter case, on the other hand, the narrator enjoys a seemingly objective relation towards their narrated subjects. While suspicion of objectivity as such is obviously a cornerstone of the contemporary critical attitude, the inward-directedness it indicates in terms of the narrator's view is validated by their personal absence from what they narrate: while the narrated self in the homodiegetic case inevitably "speaks back" to the narrator, in the heterodiegetic case the narrator's "manner of speaking" towards their subject is where critical interest lies. The same applies to an intradiegetic narrator: in this case, also, the critical sense we have of their identity as it is revealed in their narration hangs on the secondary feature, which describes their personal presence or absence within their narration.

The reverse of this is also true, however: that the perceived subjectivity of a homo- or heterodiegetic narrator depends on their status in respect to the extra-/intradiegetic question. A homodiegetic narrator, for example, who is also extradiegetic, is not previously named by the text of the novel because, as extradiegetic, he is not introduced from an outside authority but rather introduces himself, as a member of “this world,”<sup>2</sup> in the progress of his narration. Indeed, he introduces himself *by way of* his narrated self, and his narrating subjectivity is perceived in the representational field he constructs in the act of narrating himself. On the other hand, a homodiegetic narrator who is also intradiegetic has already been named and introduced by an external speaker, the necessary extradiegetic narrator, whose perspective is inevitably caught up in the representation of this character. This involves the homodiegetic narrator’s account of themselves in a tension-filled dialogue with the extradiegetic narrator’s account of *them*. A parallel dynamic exists for a heterodiegetic narrator: here their apprehended subjectivity rests on whether they are also extradiegetic and thus “in control” of their representations of the world they construct, or whether they are also intradiegetic and thus forever contained by the signifying authority of another, who names and represents them before they are given a chance to narrate and, in doing so, represent themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The two preceding paragraphs may appear mutually redundant in that they are each talking about the same things (the four basic categories of Genette’s description), but by privileging first one and then the other side of these narrating categories we can see how narrating identity and subjectivity are constructed through a dialectic that issues from the interacting thrusts of each end of the categorical nomenclature. To use Genette’s language again, in

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<sup>2</sup> As Genette describes it, “M. de Renoncourt and Crusoe are author-narrators, and as such they are at the same narrative level as their public – that is, as you and me.” Genette, *ND* 229.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to emphasise the unavoidable paradox involved in the fact that the extradiegetic narrator actually mediates the intradiegetic narrator’s words and therefore implicitly controls that representation, because generally speaking we accept and expect a good-faith “transcription” of the metadiegetic narrative: while a novel that exploits this ambiguity is conceivable, my point here is merely that the intradiegetic narrator has, of necessity, already been represented by another agent (the extradiegetic narrator) before he “finds his voice.”

terms of “level” (the extra-/intradiegetic question), narrating identity is either named or not named prior to its narrating function; in terms of “voice” (the homo-heterodiegetic question), narrating subjectivity becomes manifest in respect to the act of narration itself. The two realms, then, are necessarily involved mutually in the reader’s apprehension of a given narrator’s “character.” That said, though, the order in which I have chosen to discuss these realms is revealing: it is unavoidable that the determination of level at least marginally precedes that of voice, highlighting the slight precedence that form holds over content, in this case meaning that the narrating necessarily comes before the narrated. Effectively this means that narrating identity is either objectively named, and therefore fundamentally present, or not named, and therefore fundamentally absent, before the subjectivity of that identity reveals itself in voice. At the same time, however, voice is the more powerful and potent of the two realms in its capacity to signify and manifest subjective presence.<sup>4</sup> While level “places” identity in terms of “this” world and the world of the novel, and in doing so either names the narrator (who is thereby partially circumscribed) or fails to name them (leaving them thereby free to name or not name themselves), voice, which is already thus placed, unavoidably becomes the conduit for the verbal manifestation of that identity, through which its subjectivity is apprehended.

Recognition of these dynamics means that we are in a position to discuss the relative degrees of perceived determinability, apropos the narrator’s subjectivity, in respect to Genette’s four basic categories. We are interested here primarily in the two extreme cases, the intra-homodiegetic and the extra-heterodiegetic, which are those that are at issue in *Mason & Dixon*. The first of these, then, is, according to our investigations here, doubly determined: firstly, in respect to level, they are named and contextualised, according to an exterior point of view, by an extradiegetic narrator; and

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<sup>4</sup> In this respect, we have already seen (p 72, note 24) that in the Methuen edition of *Chance*, the haecceity of Marlow’s voice confirms his subjective presence within his narration despite the typographical inconsistencies that, as formal devices involved in the textual management of levels, suggest the fundamental undermining of that presence.

secondly, in respect to voice, they exhibit the revealing dialogue, which we observed earlier, between their narrating and narrated selves. The intra-heterodiegetic and extra-homodiegetic narrators are each less determined: the former enjoys being named by an extradiegetic narrator but is not in dialogue with a constructed version of himself; the latter is in such a dialogue, but being also extradiegetic is not therefore represented by another agent prior to his speaking.

The extra-heterodiegetic narrator remains to a great extent underdetermined: he is not named, represented or contextualised by another narrator before he begins his narrative, and his absence from that narrative means that his subjectivity is not dynamically present in a dialogue between his narrating and narrated selves. Rather, his subjectivity is present only in respect to his narration itself. As we saw earlier, his “character” comes into focus only in terms of his objectifying gaze inwards at the subjects he relates: his subjectivity, then, is revealed only in an emergent sense, in the attitudes or stances we attribute to him through the unfolding of his narrative. This is the narrator who is most elusive to criticism in a variety of respects: his sketchy yet all-pervasive subjective influence led to his characterisation as “omniscient” in a less suspicious era; his freedom from a constraining characterisation within a realist framework has made him the perfect agent in recent years for rendering a realism that is also magic; and his insubstantiality provides him with a host of tricks, which can be interpreted as disappearing acts or merely radical changes of voice, style or perspective, leading, in one example, to David Hayman’s need, in studying *Ulysses*, to provide an “arranger” who oversees such changes as they occur in that novel.<sup>5</sup> He is also, of course, and the *Ulysses* example, along with a host of others, illustrates the point, the narrator that most threatens the integrity of the concept: only present to us in the act of his narration, we take on faith the integrity of that presence, and in the modernist/postmodernist climate this faith has been

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<sup>5</sup> Hayman 70.

shaken, ridiculed and abused, to the point where we have become at least somewhat aware of our own role in the imaginary construction of this “human” figure.

### **Radically Undertermined Identity**

The slippage that I have referred to in *Mason & Dixon* involves Cherrycoke’s intra-homodiegetic voice merging into what is seemingly the original extra-heterodiegetic voice that opens the novel. This occurs firstly in respect to level, in that the typographical features (the loss of quotation marks around Cherrycoke’s speech) imply, from this formal point of view, a return to the extra-heterodiegetic situation. However, at the same time the sense of Cherrycoke’s homodiegetic voice is retained, both in respect to his narrating style and in the continued use of his first person pronoun. This retention of Cherrycoke’s voice shores up, because of its power and potency in respect to identifying his subjective agency, the sense of the intra-homodiegetic status of the narrative at this point. However, it is the original typographical move, which implicitly problematises the issue of narrative level, that makes possible the second stage in the process, where Cherrycoke’s voice is lost to the original voice of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator. This replacement could not occur, without absurdity, if the original move had not been made: Cherrycoke’s voice could not, according the most fundamental novelistic conventions, transform in this way while it was still contained within quotation marks. Thus we see again, firstly, the inbuilt primacy of questions of narrative level over voice in our apprehension of narrating identity, and, secondly, the way in which this is bound up in novelistic tradition with the formalities of typography.

This loosening of narrating identity is a foundational move in *Mason & Dixon*’s construction of its signifying potential. In terms of level, by deconstructing the opposition between extra- and intradiegetic narrators, the novel fundamentally undermines the possibility of the narrator being identified in any way that conforms to the implicit parallel ontologies that are

traditionally assumed to exist between the narrating and narrated situations. The narrator cannot, that is, be identified in terms of the novel's world or, at one diegetic remove, this one, because this narrator moves freely among the impenetrable borders of conceivable existence that this realist convention maintains. This is not merely in respect to Cherrycoke's narrative, but also, as I will discuss in more detail, it applies to the various subordinate narratives (Genette's somewhat cumbersome meta-metadiegetic narratives) that arise from within Cherrycoke's story. The narrator of the novel, then, assumes an absolute freedom in terms of what diegetic position he may occupy. He is not, as I have already argued, an extradiegetic narrator who takes on the role of "summarising" narratives of a higher diegetic level; rather, he is a radically free, ubiquito-diegetic narrator who is equally at home anywhere – and, consequently, equally unnameable in terms of anywhere else.

The necessary result of this, in respect to voice, is that this latter is denuded of any responsibility for manifesting the linguistic "essence" of the (potentially) infinitely plural narrating identity: the narrator *cannot* be conceived of as a single identity in the novel's world, so his voice cannot respond to such an identity. We cannot, as readers, expect this. This does not mean that narrating chaos ensues, firstly because the narrator maintains in his voice a perceptible haecceity that abides throughout his perennial slippage among diegetic levels (and which is, ironically, a prerequisite for our perception of such slippage), and, secondly, because that singular voice self-consciously seeks to represent only a finite portion of the theoretically infinite subjective stances its radical underdeterminability could avail itself of. This voice, thanks to its essential freedom from determinability, is able to subsume at will the linguistic markers of an-other. It does not, however, at that moment *become* that other, because it (the narrator) remains always fundamentally indeterminate. Rather, it *represents* within its own (again potentially infinite) field of signification the subdued presence of that other: the latter's influence is evoked, through a translation or representation of their forever inaccessible voice, in the language of the narrator. Primarily Cherrycoke, but also further

subordinate story-tellers within the novel, enjoy a privileged position in this respect because their presence as characters and identified speakers means they bring the narrator's representational procedures to the surface of our awareness, test the capacity of his ability to subsume and represent the voice of a known identity (without being overtaken by it), and through his success here, enable the narrator's freedom to signify similarly subsumed subjective agencies within his prose. The narrator, thereby, becomes an agent of representation of otherness: his voice (while remaining steadfastly his) incorporates within its own language translated markers of other subjective influences – these are present to us, not in themselves (who are irreducibly beyond the text), but as representations or translations of them into the familiar discourse of the narrator. It will be necessary for me to discuss this further, in terms of Cherrycoke (the primary enabler of this process of representation), and then in respect to other story-tellers within the novel, but first we can examine briefly the narrator's role as fundamentally representational before Cherrycoke even appears on the scene.

### **Representations: Anachronism**

As I have suggested, *Mason & Dixon* offers us a translated *version*, or *representation*, of Cherrycoke's story (and hence, as I will elaborate on later, a similarly rendered representation of his story-telling voice). It achieves this by way of referencing the screen, rather than an individuated voice, as the agent of narrative transmission. The screen is unchanging, whoever's narrative, from whatever diegetic level, it is representing; only the *look* of the representation, its content and perceptible difference from the rest of the film, indicates the subjective influence of the speaker. The screen abides throughout: the ubiquitous, ultimate (yet silent) voice of the medium. *Mason & Dixon*'s narration, as I have argued, represents this screen *in verbal form*: given voice, it remains nonetheless ubiquitous as the sole arbiter of content; it remains the single medium through which such content must be rendered. This is fundamental to the deconstruction of diegetic levels that I am



considering here: as with the screen, it is merely contingent that the narrator first appears, as he must, at the beginning of the novel. While the content of a film is chronologically significant, the screen by which it is represented remains unchangeably itself throughout. Likewise, the narration of *Mason & Dixon* can assume its signifying functions at any given point in the text, without the need for an accumulated sense of its epistemic and ontological limitations; it is, as said before, forever underdetermined, not confined to a previously given state, nor subject to realist expectations governing its expression of that state. As with the screen, the narration of *Mason & Dixon* has neither origin nor telos: it is merely given—unnameable, unmoving, unalterable—but irreplaceable and necessary for the apprehension of the unfolding narrative that it mediates.

As literary rather than filmic, though, this narration in *Mason & Dixon* does—indeed must—have a voice, and it is the complexities arising in this regard that my discussion here is aimed at elucidating. While the screen is all-but featureless (rectangular by convention and enjoying various technical qualities that are necessary to its function while going unobserved by its audience), the narration of *Mason & Dixon* cannot help but represent itself—reveal itself—in the haecceity of its language, resulting in the unavoidable sense of its subjective presence despite the transgression of diegetic boundaries (and therefore conceivable identity) that is an inbuilt feature of its being.<sup>6</sup> While the screen, then, does not have a *look* of its own, *Mason & Dixon*'s narration unavoidably does have a *voice*, which becomes entangled in the content it narrates. While the screen is merely a blankness upon or through which the film represents itself, the narration of *Mason & Dixon* projects both itself and its story concurrently. This dual function will provide us with an ongoing means of conceptualising the various stances the narrator adopts in his signifying to the reader *how to read* at any given point in the

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<sup>6</sup> We can witness in this regard my own ongoing discomfort in according an identity to “the narrator”: this is at once seemingly necessary and misleading, given that despite this figure’s undeniable presence, his properties contradict our realist conceptions of what that presence means.

novel. The narrator's voice, and its infinite capacity for assimilation, acts not only to transmit information (as does the screen), but also to indicate the *look*, or sensibility, that controls how that information is to be perceived. In terms of film, this *look* is manifested in the visual and aural nature of the content, meaning that, for example, Austen Powers in imminent danger is perceived differently from James Bond in a similar situation (even if the audience is unfamiliar with the two characters and views only these two scenes). Film uses its *look* to indicate to the audience how they are to read the content of its story; *Mason & Dixon*, similarly, uses the malleable voice of its narrator to inscribe any given scene with cues that direct our understanding of its representational tactics at that juncture.

It is useful, to illustrate my point, if we consider in the first instance the most basic feature of *Mason & Dixon*'s narration, which it maintains consistently throughout the novel. I am speaking, that is, of the self-consciously anachronistic language that characterises the entirety of the novel. It is unnecessary to embark upon a detailed exegesis of this language, or debate its "authenticity," because it is, to reiterate, *self-consciously anachronistic*. It certainly "looks like" writing of the eighteenth century (with its capitalisations and atavistic spellings) and its use of vocabulary is often fastidiously appropriate to that era. However, it is also syntactically more modern, and is punctuated more consistently, than eighteenth century prose, and this, along with its ongoing referencing of the late twentieth century, means that it does not pretend for a moment to be "the genuine article." What it is, in fact, is an anachronistic image of eighteenth-century writing: like all anachronisms, it is an attempt to represent the inaccessible past through the historically multi-hued lenses of the present.<sup>7</sup> This is a process of taming

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<sup>7</sup> The attempt is as much present (although differently coloured) in this self-conscious context as it is in the case of unself-conscious anachronism, the difference being that here there is an acknowledgement and happy acceptance of the futility of the attempt, which adds another, reflexive, dimension to the anachronistic images; indeed, it might be argued that self-consciousness aestheticises the anachronistic project, ironically lending it a greater "authenticity." Be that as it may, I am loath to claim that *Mason & Dixon* does not attempt to

history, an elusive and ungraspable other, of bringing it to heel through the biases and shared preconceptions of the now. The actual language, then, of *Mason & Dixon*'s narration performs the same function as the *look* of historical film: this latter, through such features as its sets and costumes, represents an image of "pastness" (of greater or lesser "accuracy"), which *Mason & Dixon* achieves through its faux-eighteenth-century prose. The novel is not, however, the equivalent of a period drama in film, because its anachronisms are self-conscious. It is, rather, more like a period farce, the kind of film that bases a good deal of its humour on play with self-conscious anachronisms.

From his first utterance, then, the narrator identifies his function as that of self-conscious representation. Despite our sense of the opacity of language, which is *de rigueur* in today's criticism, there remains the embarrassing fact that novel-reading nonetheless involves our imaginative creation of the world described by the text. This is no less the case in *Mason & Dixon*, but rather than encouraging the illusion through the use of the most "natural" linguistic structures, this novel draws attention to the illusion by foregrounding representation itself as the abiding aesthetic of its discourse. Quite aside from his diegetic fluidity, the narrator of this novel is barely conceivable as such because he speaks in a voice that is hardly imaginable as that of any living individual. His is the voice of self-conscious anachronism: representation that knowingly and happily dares to speak its own name; that acknowledges and celebrates itself as, in its every word, merely a version of a lost, unattainable other. I do not want to emphasise this for the sake of an argument on either the philosophy of, or *Mason & Dixon*'s defamiliarisation of, language. Rather, my point is to illustrate that at its very basis, in its attitude to the word, the novel's narration defines itself as an agent of representation or, better, simulation: not only do its denotative language structures represent the world of the novel (as all novelistic narrative does), but this language in itself, in its voice, represents itself *as* representation. It does not speak in a "natural" voice

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represent the past simply because it admits to a complete faithlessness in the possibility of doing so.

but rather in a voice that, like Cherrycoke's "original" story, *does not exist*; indeed, *never has existed*. As with the images of "pastness" in historical film, this linguistic style relies ultimately on readers' shared cultural conceptions of what the past is. Unavoidably anachronistic, these conceptions (even while they may revolve around verifiable fact) are filtered through the lenses of the present, and their signifying function consists in their articulation of difference or otherness: they bespeak, that is, a shared knowledge that the past, being ultimately inaccessible, can only be represented by consensual versions of what the present *is not*.

This kind of anachronism spills over into the realm of humour when it foregrounds the perspective of the present too blatantly. This can happen, broadly speaking, in two respects: either the values, ideas or knowledge of the present are projected excessively and unreasonably into the past, or an image of the past becomes so clichéd (even while remaining, perhaps, "accurate") that its presence, rather than signifying the past it supposedly represents, perversely signifies more compellingly the present that is attempting to represent the past. We can witness both forms at work respectively in two early moments of overtly anachronistic humour in *Mason & Dixon*, firstly with the reference to Clintonian pot-smoking semantics – "do not inhale" (10) – and secondly with this description of the nightlife of Portsmouth: "Sailors, mouths ajar, lope by in the lanes. Sailors in Slouch-Hats, Sailors with Queues, puffing on Pipes, eating Potatoes..." (20). This concatenation of historical references builds upon itself, becoming increasingly overstated. The images of slouch hats and queues are, if we imagine this scene in filmic terms, simply useful historical markers indicating the "pastness" of the eighteenth century. Sailors "puffing on Pipes," however, looks more self-conscious in its adoption of an image that calls upon clichéd versions of history; and the final image, of sailors loping by "eating Potatoes," takes cliché to the point of absurdity: the idea of potato-eating as a cultural signifier of travel and up-to-the-minute sophistication in this period is in itself hackneyed, and it cannot be incorporated in this fictional history in any way that does not seem

embarrassingly self-conscious. By saturating the scene with this image (having the sailors – not one, but many – walking along eating potatoes) makes a joke of our shared ideas of history, and this humour derives from and reaffirms our sense of participating in a cultural sub-discourse that endeavours, through shared conceptions of how to speak otherness, to articulate the past in the language of the present.

### **The Voice as the Look**

The narration of *Mason & Dixon*, then, participates in a reflexive construction of meaningfulness through a voice that is never immediate to itself but is rather dependent on readers to fulfil it by *knowingly* engaging it within their own shared sense of what it means to speak the voice of an-other. This establishes for the narration of the novel a paradigm for its significations based on the representation of unrepresentable otherness, a project that cannot create meaning in itself but relies wholly on a contract with readers whereby they approach the novel, in the first instance, as a series of representations that they must self-consciously engage with (and interpret) on that basis, before involving themselves in the more mundane issue of what those representations denotatively represent. The radical indeterminateness of the narrator is critical in this regard: because his subjective identity is inherently plural and can, theoretically, be anything, he is effectively a speaker, not of an individual consciousness, but of shared cultural conceptions and manners of representation. Within the construct of a discourse saturated in self-conscious anachronism (representation *as* representation), he is able to call up any number of such representational tropes that, similarly, define themselves – and how we are to respond to them – by figuring in language an image of the cultural constructions they reference and invite us to fulfil. This is the essential feature of the dual function of the narrator: his ubiquity acts as a screen through which the entire novel is represented, while his voice manifests the *look* of the novel's narration at any given point. His ubiquity means that this *look* cannot be sanctioned or

articulated by a privileged, external speaker; rather it must be represented, within his own endlessly assimilating voice, by the manners, styles and expressions that this voice is able to adopt at will.

The ubiquity of the narrator is established through his fluidity in terms of level, whereby the same voice is present in any given diegetic context, but this voice is also fluid and is able thereby to simulate the presence or influence of others. This latter feature is both a natural and necessary outcome of the former: this is because, as I have argued, diegetic level is responsible for the naming of the narrator, and in a situation of fluidity of level the narrator is, by definition, unnameable; an endlessly assimilating voice, then, confirms this unnameable status: it employs the signifying potency of voice (in terms of identifying the speaking subjectivity) to guarantee the genuineness of the fluidity of level by investing the narrator's voice with a potentially endless plurality of subjective influence. At the same time, however, this must remain consistently *the same voice* because it is through this self-identity that fluidity of level has been achieved. The narrator's voice cannot, then, be *overtaken* by the voices of others; rather, it must represent them, simulate them (as it simulates eighteenth-century English), within an endless process of assimilation. The narrator must remain at once forever the ubiquitous screen upon which the novel unfolds, without being subject to the mediation of a single, subjective agent; meanwhile, and to confirm this non-identity (because it is unavoidably threatened by its own ubiquity being rendered in individuated language), he must also represent within his voice further cultural or subjective voices, which indicate the *look* of the novel (how it is to be read) at any given point. While, then, the traditional extra-heterodiegetic narrator is underdetermined because he is both unnamed and not required to narrate himself, the narrator of *Mason & Dixon* is radically so, because his role requires that he endlessly assimilate within his voice (and unfolding identity) the voices (and, therefore, further identities) of others, meaning that he is not only *unnameable* and so *cannot* narrate himself, but also that he is invested with an infinite capacity for embodying other identities, which undermines

the sense of his every word as bringing us asymptotically closer to a revelation of his self and means, rather, that his every word in fact expands the possibilities of what that self might be.

### **Fluidity of Level**

The voices that the narrator is able to assimilate belong not only to identifiable individuals (characters) but also to cultural modes of expression (such as late twentieth-century conceptions of eighteenth-century English). It is the former element, though, that announces this underlying system (in terms of both fluidity of voice and the fluidity of level by which this is achieved) and defines its most basic operations. I am referring to the most important explicitly identifiable voice that the narrator is able to assimilate, that of Wicks Cherrycoke. As I have suggested, there is an ongoing tension in the novel between the narrator, who is identified initially as extra-heterodiegetic, and Cherrycoke, whose story-telling the former assimilates, and whose narrative is originally presented as intra-homodiegetic. The relationship between the narrator and Cherrycoke is foundational and fundamental: it provides in its dynamics not only a paradigm for the narrating operations in the novel generally, but it also paves the way for those operations to come into being. This is because the narrator/Cherrycoke relationship defines the moment at which traditional narrative structures break down, providing for the fluidity of level that characterises the narrator's role in the novel. Furthermore, it is in the sense that the narrator merely simulates a version of Cherrycoke's story, and is therefore only partially fulfilled by Cherrycoke's presence, that his fluidity of voice, his ability to assimilate other presences, is established. The narrator's fluidity among levels in this respect requires that our sense of these levels is maintained, while he nonetheless manifests his ability to move freely among them and thereby refuse being named in respect to them. Similarly, the distinction between the narrator's and Cherrycoke's hetero- and homodiegetic voices must be maintained for the sake of establishing the only partial fulfilment of the narrator by Cherrycoke's presence, meaning the

former is not limited to merely this subjective influence. Although matters of level and voice are ultimately inextricably bound up in each other, we can to an extent separate them to see more clearly these operations of fluidity in progress. I will begin with the “obvious” manifestations of the narrator’s fluidity in terms of the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels (where, according to traditional practices, Cherrycoke is respectively narrated and narrator), as these are rendered typographically. I will then move on to the equally “obvious” examples of Cherrycoke’s deictic presence within the main (ostensibly *his*) story. Because incarnations of voice are more varied, interesting, encompassing and relevant to this discussion, I will proceed then to discuss in more generalised terms the influence of Cherrycoke during the episodes at the Knockwood’s in Octarara, which falls approximately halfway through the novel, where this putative intra-homodiegetic narrator’s influence is more pronounced than elsewhere, which will allow us an insight into the extent to which the narrator is able to assimilate freely, and to varying degrees, this character’s voice.

We can see how *Mason & Dixon* affirms its narrator’s fluidity in terms of level if we examine briefly the variety of ways in which the novel uses typographical management of the relationship between the diegetic and metadiegetic narratives. This management is necessary for the abiding sense we have of these levels as boundaries to be crossed while its progressive inconsistency increasingly affirms the fluidity of the narrator throughout the course of the novel. We have seen in our examination of the early chapters of the novel that quotation marks play an important role in demarcating the diegetic levels. Put simply, the removal of quotation marks, as on pages ten and fourteen, implies the speaking voice as assuming a narrating role: in these instances we are still dealing with Cherrycoke’s voice but, as I indicated earlier, he is no longer “in shot” and the scene has changed from the LeSpark setting to that which he is describing. Characters’ speech, in other words, is rendered in quotation marks when they are “in shot,” while these are removed as their speech becomes a narrative in its own right and what they



narrate moves “into shot.” It is clearly fruitless at this point to attempt a detailed examination of this without being dragged unwillingly into a discussion of voice because, as I have elaborated above, our interest here lies in how this typographical move makes way for incursions of a narrating voice discernable from that of the apparent speaker. I will, therefore, having noted this typographical feature, discuss it more elaborately in my investigations of Cherrycoke and, following that, when I examine the meta-metadiegetic narratives that arise from within the main story.

We can further note that when dealing with narration that is not rendered in quotation marks, parentheses are used to contain quoted speech or narrative that is taking place on a lower diegetic level. Thus, on page fourteen the twins’ interruption of Cherrycoke is in parentheses, with their words in quotation marks, returning us briefly to the diegetic scene, and on page ten the primary narrator’s words are also in parentheses, indicating his extradiegetic position. Again, I will reserve my discussion of the latter phenomenon (where the parenthetical content only involves a narrating voice, rather than actually returning us to the frame setting) for my investigation of the narrator/Cherrycoke relationship, but it is worth making the point here that both phenomena appear to give voice to a speaker from an anterior diegetic level than is currently present in the narrative. I will restrict my attention here, then, to those instances where parentheses are used to render a dialogue taking place in the LeSpark household (where Cherrycoke the character and ostensible narrator is to be found) while the narrative is otherwise concerned with the main story. These parenthetical intrusions are not separated from the text by line breaks or any other typographical feature: they appear naturally within the ongoing narrative of the novel. The technique is used consistently throughout to accommodate brief interruptions (ranging from one to twenty eight lines) of the main story by the frame, occurring a total of fourteen times at reasonably regular intervals.<sup>8</sup> It becomes,

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<sup>8</sup> pp 14, 40, 110, 146, 171, 326, 345, 354, 393, 537, 652, 669, 691, 698.

in other words, an established mode in the novel for managing, typographically, shifts between the diegetic and the metadiegetic scenes.

In addition to this technique, however, a movement from the main narrative to the frame context, or vice versa, may simply be demarcated by a line break in the text. A total of nine chapters,<sup>9</sup> spread throughout the novel, begin with a passage from the frame context, followed by a line break and then a return to the main story. These passages range in length from eleven lines to a little over two pages. Again, this becomes for the reader an accustomed tool for demarcating the boundaries between the diegetic and metadiegetic contexts, with the beginning-of-chapter placement implicitly privileging the content of these over that of the frame scenes that are rendered in parentheses.<sup>10</sup> Slightly less easy to account for conceptually are the similar intrusions, again separated from the main story by a line break, that come in the middle or at the end of chapters throughout the novel.<sup>11</sup> These occur ten times, again spread fairly regularly throughout the text, meaning that by page thirty-seven the reader has encountered three different textual procedures for indicating a movement from one diegetic situation to another. Our natural interpretative curiosity leads us to seek some distinguishing feature that accounts for the difference. This is not necessarily difficult: as I said, passages at the beginning of a chapter are naturally privileged, and those that occur, separated by a line break, in the course of a chapter are typically longer and more involved than those that are contained within parentheses, ranging from ten lines to two pages. They are also more versatile, as we see during one (526-9) where we discover that the story we have been reading of Eliza Fields is actually being read in *The Ghastly Fop* by Tenebræ. Thus, these three

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<sup>9</sup> Chapters 4, 6, 11, 25, 32, 41, 42, 56, 78.

<sup>10</sup> There is a temptation to discuss these variations in terms of the film paradigm that I established in the previous chapter, suggesting, for example, that parenthetical intrusions might be considered the equivalent here of “voice-overs,” while non-parenthetical intrusions can be viewed as bringing the scene back “into shot.” There is some justification for this, certainly, but as we get deeper into the novel it seems to me that the relationship between it and its film predecessors becomes less determined, and thinking about it in such terms serves to confine rather than liberate our reading.

<sup>11</sup> pp 37-8, 56-7, 75-6, 102-4, 216-8, 307-8, 390, 526-9, 552-3, 730-1.

different procedures are perhaps slightly confusing to readers who are used to a single protocol for movement between diegetic levels, but at the same time they are introduced early, seem functionally distinguishable, and are made sufficient use of throughout to appear neither over-awing nor capricious.

Nearly halfway into the novel, however, the consistency of the above practices becomes compromised, with the frame setting intruding on the main story without either parentheses or a line break. This marks the beginning of a trend in the novel towards greater narrating fluidity as it progresses. Later, on two occasions (428, 689) there is a line break to the frame, followed by a return to the main story without any typographical mediation. Then, very late in the novel, at chapter 76 (744), for the first and only time we encounter a chapter beginning with a frame scene that then merges, unmediated, into the main story. These inconsistent practices are heralded initially, though, on page 336, where we find the narration of the main story merging into the frame setting with no typographical alert to the reader. The narrative is describing the impossibility of the proposed intersection of the meridian line from the centre of the Delaware Peninsula with a tangent point from the twelve mile arc around New Castle and the forty degree latitude that was the northern boundary of Maryland (the west line). Without any typographical shift, the frame narrative intrudes thus: "Or, 'Once upon a time,' as the Rev<sup>d</sup> re-tells it for Brae, 'there was a magical land call'd "Pennsylvania....'" Tenebrae responds with a long speech, but *this* is then intruded upon by an imagined exchange between the apparent culprits of this "Royal Geometry, fanciful as ever" (335), Charles II and his brother James, only then to return to Cherrycoke, again speaking in quotation marks, that is, in the frame context. We can pick up the passage with Tenebrae in her peroration:

"....Running *eastward* from there, the royal Brothers expect the Forty-Degree Line somewhere to encounter James's Twelve-Mile Arc about New Castle,—"  
 "Oh, twelve miles ought to do it. We don't want to say thirteen, because that's so unlucky."

"Fourteen would engross for you Head of Elk," Charles observes, "but 'twould push too far West, this vertical Line, here, —"

"The Tangent Line, Sir."

"I knew that."

"Charles and James," the Rev<sup>d</sup> sighing, "and their tangle of geometrick hopes, — that somehow the Arc, the Tangent, the Meridian, and the West Line should all come together at the same perfect Point, — where, in fact, all is Failure...." (336-7)

At the end of Cherrycoke's speech here the narrative returns, again without a line break or any other typographical indicator, to the main story. Not only, then, at this point, do the accustomed typographical demarcations between diegetic and metadiegetic contexts break down, but within that we perceive that the signifying pyrotechnics that are a feature of the narration of the metadiegetic story are able to intrude upon a diegetic passage. To be clear about this: the imagined dialogue between the two monarchs *belongs to* the kind of stylistic procedures that characterise the narration of the main story; it is not at home in the realism of the frame setting. Indeed, in tone it recalls the passage that immediately preceded the unheralded appearance of the LeSpark setting, discussing the impossibility of having the meridian line tangent to the twelve mile arc without dragging it slightly west of true north. The style, typical of the narrative of the main story, mixes seemingly accurate historicisms with flagrant anachronisms and an anonymous monologue that represents an entertaining anachronistic take on eighteenth-century foppish discourse, including a resonant snatch of anti-Jacobitism:

....there were dozens of enthusiastic amateurs, many of them members of the clergy, who from the comfort of their Fires sent the Commissioners an unceasing autumn-wind full of solutions, — which came in upon foolscap and Elephant and privately water-mark'd stock, fluttering in the doors, drifting into corners, — you'd have thought it was Fermat's Last Theorem, instead of a County Line that look'd like a Finial upon something of Mr. Chippendale's.

"Yes well of course *that's* a Question of taste, but, — look at the way it *leans*, just enough to be obvious, — honestly Cedric, it's so predictably Colonial, as if, — 'Oh they don't even know how to find North over there, well we must send our Royal Astronomers to tidy things up mustn't we, —' sort of thing when in fact it's once more the dead Hand of the second James, who went about granting all this Geometrickally impossible territory, — as unreal, in a Surveying way, as some of the other Fictions that govern'd that unhappy Monarch's Life." (335-6)

These typographically unmediated incursions of the frame into the main story occur from this point another nine times,<sup>12</sup> on only two occasions (696, 721) ending in a line break before a return to the main narrative, with on one occasion (483) the frame incursion ending the chapter, and, at all other times, the main narrative returning as it left, with no typographical cues to the reader. The last of these mirrors the first, with slippage into the frame, back into the main narrative, and then into the frame once more: a metadiegetic quotation of a letter to Mason from Maskelyne prompts a discussion in the LeSpark household, which is then overtaken by the main narrator midway through the final paragraph of page 720, only to return to Cherrycoke's quoted voice again on the following page, all without any typographical indication of the movement between diegetic levels.

In another of these passages, again involving Tenebræ and Ethelmer's reading of *The Ghastly Fop*, the narrative exploits the ambiguity of its textual position for reflexive and humorous purposes. Both Zhang and Eliza, characters in *The Ghastly Fop*, and the two cousins, are in situations pregnant with amorous potential, and the narration takes advantage of this coincidence, and its own double-diegetic status, to draw our attention to this aberration by self-consciously making clear – with words rather than typography – at what point it leaves the frame setting: “Thro’ the Gloom, close enough for her to see, he smiles. Zhang does” (533). According to both the formal and situational contexts, the first sentence could as well be describing Ethelmer as Zhang: the narrator clears up the ambiguity, but less for purposes of communication than to draw attention to his own complicity in, and awareness of, the diegetic upheaval that is taking place. However, this is such a rare (and gratuitous) move of overt informational management on the part of the narrator that its purpose is most significantly as a rule-proving exception. The rule, which I have posited and which my argument here is

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<sup>12</sup> pp 341, 408-9, 481-3, 497, 533, 579, 695-6, 720-1.

slowly working its way towards comprehensively articulating, is that the narrator is a conduit for the act of representation at any textual level and with any subjective pose; he does not mediate between levels, nor define narrating consciousnesses, but rather he moves fluidly among the former and speaks fluently in the voices of the latter.

### **Fluidity of Voice (I)**

The typographical anomalies in the management of levels that I have been discussing operate alongside the more stable and seemingly reasonable procedures that *Mason & Dixon* establishes before page 336. The result of this is to increasingly render the sense of all of these as arbitrary in terms of communication, meaning they are apprehended by readers as stylistic, aesthetic effects that occur within a larger paradigm of fluidity among diegetic levels. As I have suggested, though, this fluidity manifests itself in dialogue with a necessary, and complimentary, fluidity of voice. We have already found in the previous chapter that the novel's critical move in allowing for this is to have Cherrycoke's narrating voice merge into the voice of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator who opens the novel. Just as this merging relies on the prior removal of quotation marks from what is discernibly Cherrycoke's voice, similarly, the typographical inconsistencies we have been discussing rely for their total impact (that is, not merely seeming contrived and capricious) on the singularity of the narrating voice that abides throughout the movements between levels. This singularity, indeed, is emphasised and confirmed by the fact that the seamless textual merging of these levels is successfully achieved. That is, if distinguishable narrative voices were operating at its various levels, the novel's movement between these (however much more varied and contradictory the typographical mediation of it chose to be) would necessarily reflect that sense of differentially owned narrative and the sense of fluidity would be lost.

The haecceity of the voice that dominates the narration of the novel (the primary narrator), however, is in constant tension with the ongoing fact

that the diegetic levels – narrating voice notwithstanding – are present and discernible, and with the fluctuating sense we have of Cherrycoke’s “ownership” of the story he is ostensibly narrating. In the first place, the various typographical moves that I have discussed in fact recall our attention to the existence of the levels that they seem intent on denying. This implicitly reminds us of a narrative set-up that, appealing to the inertia of our expectations derived from literary tradition, confounds us with the unavoidable expectation that these levels *are in fact* diegetic – that they will be represented, that is, in the voices of their putative owners. Additionally, as I have further noted at various points, these levels are distinct in terms of their implicit placement within literary tradition: the frame narrative is strictly realist, while the main story is subject to a seemingly unlimited scope of fantastical events. This marked difference in the empirical realities of these fictional worlds anticipates different origins and different modes of expression and, therefore, implies different narrating subjectivities. In fact, however, this is rather a product of the primary narrator’s ability to assimilate different cultural voices: in the diegetic context he speaks a narrating subjectivity that reflects the realist tradition; in the intradiegetic context this same narrator represents the influence of romance and fantasy. Furthermore, and even more unsettling for the reader who is coming to terms with reading Cherrycoke’s story as *not* Cherrycoke’s, conversations in the frame invariably revolve around the events of the main story: in other words, at each return to the frame, the LeSpark characters remind us that *they* at least are listening to a story told by Cherrycoke, which seems, despite it all, to be following the same narrative trajectory as our story, but which, however, according to our own sense of voice, denies utterly being that which is told by Cherrycoke.<sup>13</sup> None

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<sup>13</sup> An excellent example of this is at the beginning of chapter ten, when Pliny suggests that Cherrycoke demonstrate the transit of Venus “upon the Orrery,” this scene issuing immediately from the close of the previous chapter, where Mason and Dixon are explaining the phenomenon to the Vroom girls. The contrasting moods of the different diegetic contexts, though, is clear: while the LeSpark’s offer an image of gentle family piety, the Vroom girls are the opposite, with their “jaunty little Chins and slender Necks, posing, and re-posing, blond girls laughing together, growing sticky and malapert” (93). The contrast brings home to us

of these difficulties would attend our viewing of the film version of the novel, such as I hinted at in the previous chapter, but, as I said then, the necessary presence of a narrating voice in this novelistic context brings these issues to the surface because we anticipate here that our extradiegetic narrator will speak in a voice that seems to belong to a single, subjective agency and, having named a secondary narrator, that this figure will maintain a voice that we can identify with his name.

I am not, I must make clear, primarily interested in giving an account of the narratological difficulties this novel throws up, so much as I am looking to articulate the manner of reading they call for. This reading manner, however, derives from these difficulties because they constantly remind us of what the novel is *not* doing in terms of its representational strategies; this, simply put, creates in the ensuing confusion the possibility of the approach to reading that I am elaborating, which is able to apprehend the novel in terms of what it *is* doing in its representations. While the novel establishes Cherrycoke's narrating voice as merging into another, as I suggested in the previous chapter it is important, for the ambiguity here evoked, that Cherrycoke's presence be not entirely obliterated from our reading of that other voice. Just as our apprehension of fluidity in terms of diegetic level requires that our sense of these levels abides, it remains necessary that the fluidity of voice rests on our ongoing awareness of this fluidity in practice: the narrator cannot simply appropriate the narration in its entirety without thereby establishing a privilege resembling too closely the traditional one of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator. Fluidity of level and fluidity of voice require that this kind of diegetic privilege, and the topographical view of the novel that it inspires, be abandoned in favour of a comprehensive diegetic destabilisation, based on an intractable tension between, on the one hand, putative levels that are undermined by a single voice and, on the other, a seemingly singular voice that is nonetheless infected with the plurality

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the impossibility of Cherrycoke's relating to the LeSparks virtually *any* of what we read of "his" narrative of Mason and Dixon's sexual adventures at the Cape.



suggested by levels. In *Mason & Dixon*, this infection of the narrating voice occurs most profoundly in respect to Cherrycoke's influence because this latter, the supposed homo-intradiegetic narrator, manifests as an irreducible threat to the singularity of the primary narrator, who is charged with representing Cherrycoke's story. I must now examine, then, the ways in which this tension is dramatised in terms of the competing hetero- and homodiegetic voices of the narrator and Cherrycoke.

### Fluidity of Voice (II)

As I have said, fluidity of voice is a natural and necessary outcome of fluidity of level. It is natural in the sense that inherent ambiguity in terms of level undermines the function of level in securing an absolute identity for a given narrator: the narrator *cannot* be named and conscripted within the traditional novelistic conventions because these, as we have seen, depend on stability in the novel's internal constructions of level. A fundamentally unnameable narrator – a narrator who defies the realist assumptions governing individuated ontological space and thereby occupies spaces explicitly accorded to multiple individuals – can logically make claim to the multiple voices that adhere to these individuals. At the same time, fluidity of voice is necessary in this context to affirm and shore up the prior establishment of fluidity in terms of level: it proves the authenticity of the original move by refusing to allow the implied narrating subjectivity to be, in a favoured phrase from *Mason & Dixon*, “reduced to Certainty.”<sup>14</sup> Again we witness, then, the mutual interactions and supplementations that operate between matters of level and matters of voice: they each simultaneously dictate the operating principle of the other.

The significance of Cherrycoke to the narrating situation; the ethical sensibility he confers on the novel as a whole; and the abiding (though problematic) sense of his “ownership” of the metadiegetic narrative, all mean

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<sup>14</sup> This phrase first appears in the letter of chastisement Mason and Dixon receive from the Royal Society (45). They are confused by its air of scientific positivism, and the novel makes ironic use of the image a further four times (177, 182, 534, 636).

that he could be regarded (in another reading) as an omnipotent, omnipresent narrating divinity: he certainly enjoys a status and *presence* that goes beyond that of the silenced intradiegetic narrator in film. This pervasive role as an immanent novelistic conscience is referred to when, towards the end of the novel, Dixon, in his efforts to relieve his gout, is found by Mason eating from “giant Heaps of Cherries and Charcoal” (750). The obvious pun here, that Dixon is consuming cherry-coke, goes beyond merely opportunistic language games and carries suggestions of the Eucharist and Cherrycoke’s Christ-like status in the novel. While this relates in one respect to the moral authority Cherrycoke retains throughout the novel, it is also a statement about his pervasiveness, his constant *presence*, his immanence within the world (that is, the text) of *Mason & Dixon*. At the risk of seeming overly seduced by a trope that is never more than frivolously treated by the novel, this throws up a particularly useful way of articulating the legacy I find, in this narrated context, of its derivation from the screen tradition of narrated flashback: in the latter case we can say that the sense of the narrator’s presence is transubstantiated from the “accidental” outward and secular form of visual presentation (the narrator’s ownership inheres, by an act of magic, within a form in which he is manifestly absent); in *Mason & Dixon*, on the other hand, with its novelistic narration and consequent foregrounding of the word, Cherrycoke’s presence is consubstantiate with the secular voice of the narrator: they each inhere mutually in the form.<sup>15</sup> While, as we have seen,

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<sup>15</sup> Consubstantiation, the Eucharist’s mutual embodiment of the substance of both bread and Christ’s flesh, is broadly speaking the doctrine of low Anglicanism and Protestantism and is vulgarly characterised in *Mason & Dixon* by Squire Haligast when he finds it articulated by the form of the sandwich, where both bread and flesh inhere: “Disks of secular Bread, — enclosing whilst concealing slices of real Flesh, yet a-sop with Blood, under the earthly guise of British Beef, all, — but for the Species of course, — Consubstantiate, thus... the Sandwich, Eucharist of this our Age” (367).

Transubstantiation is the longer-standing Catholic doctrine, where the body and blood of Christ constitute the entire substance of the Eucharist, with the outward, secular forms of bread and wine being mere “accidents,” of no substantive reality, that abide after consecration.

Cherrycoke refers to the terms in his writings twice in the novel (86, 385) and his own views are given in the latter case where he agrees with the traditional view of transubstantiation but as it was conceived by Haimo of Halberstadt in the ninth century,

Cherrycoke's story-telling voice is subsumed by that of the primary narrator, his ongoing influence upon (or presence within) that narrator abides. In fact, the implied intimacy between Cherrycoke's story-telling function and the narrating voice that largely performs this function for him tends to overflow the ostensible diegetic boundaries to the extent that the sense of Cherrycoke's presence subsists even in such instances where the narrator is occupied with the diegetic setting. In other words, just as we found that the narration of the various diegetic levels within the novel is not defined at any point in terms of that diegetic arrangement and is equally at home in any diegetic context, equally the suggestion of Cherrycoke's presence within that narration is not confined to his metadiegetic narrative but is an integral feature of its implied being and as such is potentially as resonant in one setting as it is in another.

Cherrycoke's role is significant for this discussion less in terms of his own character than because he is critical as the enabler and constant reminder of the irreducible fluidity of voice in the novel, towards which this argument is approaching an articulation. Without this essential, in-built paradigm, which subsists by way of the underlying and inescapable tension between the original extra-heterodiegetic and subsequent intra-homodiegetic voices of the primary narrator and Cherrycoke, we would not be able to appreciate its radical consequences, which reach well beyond this basic dualism. We have already seen in the opening passages of Cherrycoke's story some of the basic narrating moves that distinguish his voice from that of the primary narrator. In these early moments, the sense of his speaking voice is retained, even

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whereby "the outward forms are given to bread and wine as an act of God's mercy...." This implies a symbolic view of the Eucharist, which is how Cherrycoke actually describes it on the following page, which is in a sense more "modern" even than that of consubstantiation. (We also find Mason—despite his deism—subscribing to this view when he finds Rebekah's ghost representing her "at her most vital and belov'd" and wonders whether this could be, "like the Bread and Wine, a kindness of the Almighty, sparing him a sight he could not have abided" [171].)

As we might expect from Pynchon, the novel evinces no interest in resolving the debate or taking a side in it: rather, it plays with the metaphorical, symbolic and analogical potentialities it proffers. This accords with my own take on it in respect to the question of narrating embodiment: as with their significance to Christian doctrine, the terms here provide a helpful (and topical) way of articulating difference.

without quotation marks, by the presence of his first person pronoun and his continued use of the past tense, which contrasts with the general predominance elsewhere (both in the frame and main story contexts) of a present tense narration. At the same time, we have also seen that during such speech the primary narrator may intrude in parentheses, using the present tense. We can see all these features in action at the moment where Cherrycoke's speech first loses its quotation marks: "Tho' my Inclination had been to go out aboard an East Indiaman (the Rev<sup>d</sup> continues)..." (10). However, in keeping with the deconstructive procedures of the novel, these diegetic and deictic indicators become, throughout, subject to ongoing destabilisation and ambiguity.

Indeed, the above pattern is in fact only repeated once in the novel, and very late in the piece at that. Referring to an absurd debate between the two protagonists, the narrative reads: "And so on (records the Rev<sup>d</sup>). This actually very interesting Discussion extended till well past Midnight, that Night. If I did lose full Consciousness now and then, 'twas less from their issueless Bickering, than from the Demands of the Day, as part of the Tribute we must pay, merely to inhabit it" (649).<sup>16</sup> Later, we find a similar example, which follows from the one moment we found above where a chapter begins in the frame and moves into the main story without a line break. Here we find all the features above but without Cherrycoke's pronoun, which makes sense in that he was absent from the scene he describes. I will quote from the beginning of the chapter, the topic being Mason's trip to Scotland:

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<sup>16</sup> The fact that the narrator tells us here that Cherrycoke "records" this is interesting also, implying less his speaking voice than a quotation from one of his writings. This in fact alerts us to another ongoing ambiguity in the novel: whether Cherrycoke is extemporising his narrative, as one might expect, or reading it from his notebooks. The latter suspicion is aroused by its very early suggestion in the novel when Cherrycoke is beginning his story: "The Revd, producing a scarr'd old Note-book, cover'd in cheap Leather, begins to read..." (8). However, as I am arguing here that Cherrycoke's "original" narrative is inaccessible beneath the narration of the novel, such questions, while intriguing, must be subordinated to footnote status.

"Now, Dr. Johnson, along with Boswell acting as his Squire, happen'd, in August of 'seventy-three, to be crossing into Scotland as well, upon their famous Trip to the Hebrides."

"More likely," snorts Ives, "they didn't pass within a hundred miles of Mason."

Yet (speculates the Rev<sup>d</sup>), did they hesitate, upon the Border, at some rude Inn, just before taking the fatal Step across into the Celtick Unknown?... Sitting at a table, drinking Ale, observing the Mist thro' the Window-Panes, Mason forty-five, the Cham sixty-four. "You seem a serious young man, with Thames-side intonations in your Voice, if I'm not mistaken." (744)

It is worth noting, also, that by the time the narrator's voice returns, at the end of the first six lines of this conversation between Mason and Johnson, it has adopted again to its accustomed present tense. On four other occasions we find similar parenthetical intrusions, explicitly reminding us of Cherrycoke's putative ownership of the story, but in these cases "his" narration is in the present tense, to differing degrees problematising the identification. In the first his pronoun is present, and the scene-setting function and tone in fact justify (at least from a modern-day point of view) the present tense, even for verbal narration; the material, further, "sounds" like Cherrycoke's spoken language, especially with his explicitly addressing the "Children," which acts deictically much like his personal pronoun. However, as the passage continues its material renders it increasingly less conceivable as what Cherrycoke would expose to his young listeners, and the song with which he concludes makes this suggestion positively farcical:

So off we sail again (the Rev<sup>d</sup> continues), this time in convoy with another, larger Frigate, — the idea being, Children, always to get back up on the Horse that has nearly killed one. Especially if it's a Sea Horse. I am quarter'd with Lieutenant Unchleigh, a rattle-head. "Damme, Sir, — a Book? Close it up immediately."

"'Tis the Holy Bible, Sir."

"No matter, 'tis Print, — Print causes Civil Unrest, — Civil Unrest in any Ship at Sea is intolerable. Coffee as well. Where are newspapers found? In those damnable Whig Coffee-Houses. Eh? A Potion stimulating rebellion and immoderate desires."

I feel a certain Gastrick Desolation. What will be his idea of Diversion ashore? Nothing to do with Coffee, I suppose, — tho' this Route to India be known as a Caffeinist's Dream. What else may he not abide? My Berth a Prison, unseamanlike Behavior abounding, the very Ship a Ship of Death. How is any of this going to help restore me to the "ordinary World"? — the answer, which I am yet too young to see, being that these are the very given

Conditions of the “ordinary World.” At the time, my inward lament goes something like this, —

Where are the wicked young Widows tonight,  
That sail the East India Trade?  
Topside with the Captain, below with the Crew,  
Beauteously ever display’d.  
Oh I wish I was anyplace,  
But the Someplace I’m in,  
With too many Confusions and Pains, —  
Take me back to the Cross-Roads,  
Let me choose, once again,  
To cruise the East India Lanes. (48)

Following this the narration returns to its accustomed voice, with as little suggestion of Cherrycoke’s presence as is found generally throughout. On the three further occasions where we are reminded of Cherrycoke’s supposed narration in this parenthetical manner,<sup>17</sup> but where his pronoun is absent and the narration is in the present tense, the degree to which his influence or presence is discerned lies in the subjective response of the reader. Broadly speaking, though, in these instances the narration reads as it does throughout the novel, but the suggestion that the thoughts or opinions being articulated belong to Cherrycoke — while being rendered in a different voice — is to varying degrees plausible.

These basic loci for identifying narrating subjectivity, then, serve cumulatively more to problematise the issue than to clarify it, in keeping with the general procedures of the novel that I have been discussing. The important point, though, is that this does not render narratological chaos so much as allow, through a kind of textual play, a narrating presence such as Cherrycoke’s to combine and recombine with the main narrator’s in a constant process of affirmation and undermining: he is there; he is not there; he is partially there; he is possibly there: his presence lies beneath the text, sometimes raising itself into almost total view, at other times partly visible, and at others seemingly wholly absent (such as at moments of blatant

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<sup>17</sup> pp 218: “(the Revd has meanwhile continu’d)”; 286: “(speculates the Revd)”; 316: “(the Revd Cherrycoke presently resumes).”

anachronism or vulgarity). It would be tiresome and excessive at this point to construct a comprehensive taxonomy of the many ways this operates throughout the novel (so far I have examined only its obvious manifestations), but a brief description, in the terms I have employed thus far, would go something like this: the presence of Cherrycoke's pronoun inevitably suggests strongly his speaking presence, especially if this is in conjunction with past tense narration; this latter, though, can appear without any overt suggestion of Cherrycoke, while it does, nevertheless, give the narrative a sense of "toldness" (a more natural, verbal sense than the more prevalent present tense voice – this will be important in my discussion in the chapter following this one); conversely, while the main narrator operates mostly in the present tense, occasionally quoted narrative also uses this form when describing a past event, undermining the implied totality of a schema whereby characters will narrate in the past tense while the narrator uses the present.<sup>18</sup> These features – pronouns, tense and parentheses – also interact in manifold ways, as well as occur significantly in respect to narratives told within the main story, which I will discuss in some detail presently.

It is possibly most useful, then, given the fruitless burden a comprehensive taxonomy would entail, to concentrate on a reading experience of the operations of these diegetic and deictic markers, which, as should now be clear, render speaking identity radically ambiguous throughout the novel. A discussion of the reading experience will alert us to the important feature of this fluidity of voice: that its representational potential subsists on a very basic phrasal level, rather than merely at certain self-conscious moments in the text, which my preceding discussion may have implied. This is important to my argument because the point here is not,

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Cherrycoke in the frame context discussing Maskelyne: "... twenty-nine years old, first time he's been away from home, and he's facing months...quite alone in the mid-Atlantic..." (106); Mason relating to Dixon a conversation with Maskelyne: "Hastily he goes on to explain..." (252); Cherrycoke in the frame again, relating a conversation with a young Peggy Shippen: "'What is your work, little Girl?' asks your innocent Uncle. 'To marry a General,' she replies..." (308); the first paragraph of Dixon's story of John Lambton (588); and Captain Shelby's relating of the Devil's legal problems (605).

ultimately, the *strain* between the narrator's and Cherrycoke's voices, but rather how the former, which in fact, through the fluidity I am describing, enjoys dominion over the entire narration, signifies the presence of the latter at will. My discussion to date has concentrated on the relatively rare (in the context of a 773 page novel) overt reminders of the double-leveled narrating space; as I have said, however, the importance of these lies in how they set up a scheme of signification that rests, in the first instance, on Cherrycoke's ambiguous presence, but which extends far beyond this. To be clear: the presence, say, of a first person pronoun does not fundamentally displace the main narrator's voice, introducing thereby the voice of Cherrycoke; rather, given the fundamental leveling that is taking place here, the main narrator's voice is, without contradicting its "identity," able to subsume or incorporate into its voice this deictic marker of Cherrycoke's. The latter's presence does not replace, but is represented by, the language of the former. As I have indicated, this endows the main narrator with an infinite capacity for the representation of an-other presence within his own voice: the original instance of this voice's tension with Cherrycoke's does not, that is, saturate the subjective possibilities of the main narrator; instead it creates the possibility whereby that narrator becomes defined and determined only by his endless capacity to represent the presence of otherness.<sup>19</sup>

It is helpful, then, to extend my discussion of Cherrycoke's influence into the more fluid realm of a prolonged passage where that influence waxes and wanes within the constant presence of the main narrator. This will provide us with a less deterministic sense of the narrating procedures of the novel, which will suggest more accurately the extent of means by which it is able to signify, in its own narrating poses, an always-fleeting other identity. We can begin with an examination of chapters thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-eight, and thirty-nine, which take place on the way to, and at, Octarara, and

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<sup>19</sup> This should not be taken as a form of free indirect discourse, where the narrator specifically refers to another character's speech in their utterance, maintaining (indeed reinforcing) the discreet identities of the two; rather, in *Mason & Dixon* these identities *are not discreet*, mutually inhering within the utterance in radical ambiguity.



where Cherrycoke is more discernibly “present” in his narrating function than elsewhere in the novel. Having discussed the most bold-faced manifestations of Cherrycoke’s narrating influence, this is a move closer to the more subtle areas of its signification; while still dealing with an “obvious” example, we are following the important thread of Cherrycoke’s privileged status increasingly deeper into the less obvious realm of the novel’s line-by-line simulations of the presence of manifold narrating subjectivities. To maintain this trajectory, the signifying stances that I find in these stand-out chapters will be further examined in respect to their mirrors from throughout the rest of the novel. This will lead to a fairly comprehensive conception of the fluidity of voice, with respect to Cherrycoke’s influence, in the novel, from where we can, using the same chapters, introduce a more elaborate description of representation in *Mason & Dixon* by way of a culminating discussion of the Cherrycoke factor, looking at how he is figured, not as a narrating voice, but as a narrated object.

### **Towards Octarara**

There is an explicit (and arbitrary) lead-in to the content of chapter thirty-five, from the frame scene that opens the chapter, when Uncle Lomax’s opening of a bottle of peach brandy from Octarara reminds Cherrycoke that he “once surviv’d a Fortnight, Snow-bound, upon little else” (352). This already places Cherrycoke squarely onstage amid the events he will relate, which is reflected by his strong presence in the narrative voice as the passage begins:

’Twas a more tranquil time, before the War, when people moved more slowly, — even, marvelous to say, here in Philadelphia, where the *bustling* might yet be distinguish’d from the *hectic*. There were no Sedan Chairs. Many went about on foot. Even Saint Nicholas was able to deliver all his Gifts, and yet find time for a brisk Pint at The Indian Queen.

Even here we can detect the dual presences of Cherrycoke and the main narrator: there is the conversational rhythm, in concert with the past tense, as well as the deictic references to “here” and thus, implicitly, to “now” (after, as opposed to “before” the war), all of which mark Cherrycoke’s influence,

culminating in the reference to “Saint Nicholas,” which reminds us that Cherrycoke is pitching his narrative to the children (although ironically the youngest of these, Pliny and Pitt, have already been sent to bed). At the same time, though, the phrase “where the *bustling* might yet be distinguish’d from the *hectic*,” as well as the references to sedan chairs and going about on foot, suggest also the main narrator’s sense of humour in his absurd fun with anachronistically self-conscious language and images (motorised transport, for example). This is not to say that Cherrycoke’s presence disappears with these lines; rather, what we have operating here is a version of Bakhtin’s dialogism: because the lines are not *absolutely* Cherrycoke’s (they are not, that is, in quotation marks) he is safe from complicity in the narrator’s anachronistic games – while still retaining some degree of inertial presence – and the two influences thereby become mutually active in this narrative moment. The words, to put it another way, might be happily regarded as Cherrycoke’s, but their way of rising out of their immediate denotative context, of signifying knowingly, to a knowingly modern reader, is the work of the narrator.

The two paragraphs following this one retain a strong sense of Cherrycoke’s speaking presence. The second, however, is narrated in the present tense, mitigating this somewhat, and towards its end, with the description of Mr. and Mrs. Edgewise, Cherrycoke’s voice becomes more ambiguous, especially with the rendering of the word “idiot” by the initial “I.,” which emphasises the written, rather than spoken, form, as well as with the anachronistic appeals of words such as “Bloody-Minded,” “twittering,” and “Frightfully,” and with the narrator’s use of free indirect discourse (referencing Mrs. Edgewise’s voice) in the final sentence:

Mr. Edgewise is traveling with his Wife, who, when she must, regards him with a Phiz that speaks of the great amounts of her time given over, in a philosophickal way, to classifying the numerous forms of human idiot, beyond the common or Blithering sort, with which all are familiar, — the Bloody-Minded I., for example, recognized by the dangerous sea of white all around the irises of the eye-balls, or the twittering Variety, by the infallible utterance “Frightfully.” Then one has Mr. Edgewise.... (153-4)

The paragraph following this, however, *sounds* more like Cherrycoke's speaking voice again, both syntactically and in respect to its moral point of view:

We have passed, tho' without comment, out of the zone of influence of the western mountains, and into that of Chesapeake, — as there exists no "Maryland" beyond an Abstraction, a Frame of right lines drawn to enclose and square off the great Bay in its unimagined Fecundity, its shoreline tending to Infinite Length, ultimately unmappable, — no more, to be fair, than there exists any "Pennsylvania" but a chronicle of Frauds committed serially against the Indians dwelling there, check'd only by the Ambitions of other Colonies to north and east.

This strong sense of Cherrycoke's presence abides into the next paragraph, but Cherrycoke's description of his coach, "wherein the inside is quite noticeably larger than the outside," while he explicitly addresses this to one of his listeners, DePugh, seems also a wink to modern readers, referencing science fiction and, possibly, Dr. Who's Tardis.<sup>20</sup> This is mirrored two pages later when Mr. Edgewise produces "a Flask" (as with the coach, reputedly of Jesuit design), which is both magically inexhaustible and clearly (with its heat-retaining properties) inspired by the modern day thermos.

After a parenthetical interruption by the frame, which further emphasises Cherrycoke's speaking presence, this presence continues throughout the two-paragraph description of Luise and Mitzi Redzinger, until its very end where their faces are described as "innocent of all paint, patches, or pincering, naked as Eve's own" (355), which reads as a double-voiced rendering of Cherrycoke's consciousness and our own, combining a celebration of religious purity with late twentieth-century familiarity with the practice of Western body piercing.

Immediately following this, there is a description of Mr. Edgewise in which the narrator's presence is far more perceptible than Cherrycoke's. Addressing Luise and Mitzi, "Mr. Edgewise leans forward to introduce

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<sup>20</sup> This coach's magical properties recall the one that takes Mason and Dixon, in one night, from Philadelphia to Mount Vernon (274) and also anticipates Lepton Castle, some fifty pages later, where "the Surveyors find more room inside than could possibly be contained in the sorrowing ruin they believ'd they were entering" (412).

himself in a mucilaginous voice he would have described rather as cordial." From this point, Cherrycoke's influence waxes and wanes: when describing himself and his feelings especially (thus referencing his homodiegetic status), his presence is strongly felt; at other points, such as in the paragraph dealing with "the Flask," the tone and syntax point more to the narrator's accustomed prose style. This predominance of the narrator's voice, uninflected by that of Cherrycoke, continues throughout Luise Redzinger's account of her sister's life, evidenced particularly by Mrs. Edgewise's consoling words being accompanied by her "taking the young woman's hand," at which "[h]er husband huffs forward, intending a similar Courtesy toward the young Woman's knee, but is deflected by a wifely stare, that contrives to look amused, tho' indisposed to bantering" (357). Following this, however, the pronoun "we," plus the reference to the coachman as "our Jehu son of Nimshi," (this being both a contemporary figure of speech and a biblical reference) brings Cherrycoke's voice back to prominence.

On the following page, after Luise's account of her husband's enlightenment whilst nearly drowning in a pit of hops, the narrator's presence (reflected in another reference to marijuana, one of Pynchon's favourite pop-cultural themes) is apprehended in equal measure with Cherrycoke's: "Certain herbal essences in massive influxion, as I feel it my duty to assure her, have long been known and commented upon, as occasions of God-revealing" (358). Cherrycoke's discernible presence continues, in dialogue with the narrator's, with distressed references to deism – which recalls the Cherrycokean reference a few pages earlier to "this Deistically stained age" (355), the sentiment of which being further expressed explicitly in a later extract from Cherrycoke's *Undeliver'd Sermons*, referring to deism as "faithless pretending to be holy" (511) – alongside the narrator's style of bathetic wit, evidenced in this description of what Cherrycoke describes in the above-quoted sermon as "a proliferation of Sects and Sects branching from Sects": "They wander the town streets, they haunt the desert places, they are usually Germans. Woe betide the credulous countryman who falls under their

influence, — or, as in the case of Peter Redzinger, is transform'd into one of them" (358). These sentences belong *irreducibly, at once*, to both Cherrycoke and the primary narrator.

We can see this also in the following two paragraphs, where there is a movement from a very strong Cherrycokean presence to that presence in ambiguous tension with further sensibilities, implied both in terms of *what* is said and *how* it is said:

Another American Illumination, another sworn moment, — and where in England are any Epiphanies, bright as these? Bring anything like one, — any least Sail upon the Horizon of our Exile, — to the attention of an Established Clergyman, and 'twill elicit nought but gentle Reproofs and guarded Suggestions, which must sooner or later include the word "Physician."

These times are unfriendly toward Worlds alternative to this one. Royal Society members and French Encyclopædists are in the Chariot, availing themselves whilst they may of any occasion to preach the Gospels of Reason, denouncing all that once was Magic, though too often in smirking tropes upon the Church of Rome, — visitations, bleeding statues, medical impossibilities, — no, no, far too foreign. One may be allowed an occasional Cock Lane Ghost, — otherwise, for any more in that Article, one must turn to Gothick Fictions, folded acceptably between the covers of Books. (358-9)

To begin with the metaphor of the chariot: this derives clearly from the actual coach in which the scene is taking place and therefore identifies Cherrycoke's consciousness, which is emphasised at the chapter's close by an extract from Cherrycoke's writing that night:

"What Machine is it," young Cherrycoke later bade himself goodnight, "that bears us along so relentlessly? We go rattling thro' another Day, — another Year, — as thro' an empty Town without a Name, in the Midnight...we have but Memories of some Pause at the Pleasure-Spas of our younger Day, the Maidens, the Cards, the Claret, — we seek to extend our stay, but now a silent Functionary in dark Livery indicates it is time to re-board the Coach, and resume the Journey. Long before the Destination, moreover, shall this Machine come abruptly to a Stop...gather'd dense with Fear, shall we open the Door to confer with the Driver, to discover that there is no Driver,...no Horses,...only the Machine, fading as we stand, and a Prairie of desperate Immensity...." (361)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This quote is introduced, not explicitly as writing, but rather as how Cherrycoke "bade himself goodnight"; however, we have already learned that he was driven that night "to

To further complicate things, however, the passage also, unavoidably, recalls a description of life under capitalism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, mingling Cherrycoke's eighteenth-century pious concerns at the progress of modernity, with deeply cynical twentieth century disgust at where that progress has taken us. The *Gravity's Rainbow* piece reads thus:

Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide . . . though he's amiable enough, keeps cracking jokes through the loudspeaker [...] On you roll, across a countryside whose light is forever changing – castles, heaps of rock, moons of different shapes and colors come and go. There are stops at odd hours of the mornings, for reasons that are not announced: you get out to stretch in lime-lit courtyards where the old men sit around the table under enormous eucalyptus trees you can smell in the night, shuffling the ancient decks oily and worn, throwing down swords and cups and trumps major in the tremor of light while behind them the bus is idling, waiting – *passengers will now reclaim their seats* and much as you'd like to stay, right here, learn the game, find your old age around this quiet table, it's no use: he is waiting beside the door of the bus in his pressed uniform, Lord of the Night he is checking your tickets, your ID and travel papers, and it's the wands of enterprise that dominate tonight . . . as he nods you by, you catch a glimpse of his face, his insane, committed eyes, and you remember then, for a terrible few heartbeats, that of course it will end for you all in blood, in shock, without dignity – but there is meanwhile this trip to be on . . .<sup>22</sup>

To return to the original quote, the reference to “bleeding statues, medical impossibilities,” furthermore, seems also mediated by a twentieth-century consciousness, and the Cock Lane Ghost operates throughout the novel as a kind of self-consciously anachronistic image of “pastness” such as I have already discussed. At the same time, however, the mention of Gothick Fictions returns us to the frame scene that opened the chapter and the debate there apropos the acceptability of reading romance and novels (350-1).

Luise Redzinger's next speech, however, is followed by three paragraphs in which the narrator adopts quite a different style. Cherrycoke is no longer palpably present and the narrative provides something like an “omniscient” summary of the Redzingers' situation: there is suddenly an

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diaristic excess” (354), so we assume it is his writing rather than merely inner monologue, although the distinction is not particularly important for this argument.

<sup>22</sup> Pynchon, *GR* 412-3.

intimacy between these characters and the narrator, which contrasts with the earlier need for Luise to speak on their behalf (the narrator is no longer, that is, implicitly able to access only that information which Cherrycoke is also privy to). We are told, then, that,

Peter Redzinger has always known good land, he can look at it and tell you, if you ask, what it will bear in Abundance, what it will not tolerate. This place [his farm], as he recogniz'd from frequent visits to it in Dreams since he was young, would give him back anything he wished. (359)

Following this information, we again hear from Luise, but this time the quote is unmediated by the narration, no longer emphasising Cherrycoke's presence with her in the coach: the quote is merely given, merely present, in the more accustomed style of the novel, implying that control of the passage has shifted back into the hands of the primary narrator. This intimacy between the narrator and his subjects is further indicated by his access to Luise's thoughts, his ability to quote Peter, and his deep knowledge of the details of their lives – their sons are simply “the Boys” to him, needing no further introduction.<sup>23</sup> I will quote the entire second paragraph of this (in the context of chapter thirty-five) new narrating style. The initial subject matter is Peter's sensitivity to *Die Krafte* of the land:

Sometimes he tried to talk to Luise about this, but with such difficulty that she always ended up thinking about her sister in Bethlehem, and the Dancing she might be missing, after all. “...And it comes from the wind moving through the underbrush...it is inside of the Wind, and they are real words, and if you listen...” She must have known quite early, that the Hop-pit, or something as decisive, was waiting for them. Meanwhile, maize and morning glories, tomatoes and cherry trees, every flower and Esculent known to Linnæus, thriv'd. The seasons swept through, Mitzi, and then the Boys, were born, Luise and Peter built a Bakery, Smokehouse, Stables, Milk-barn, Hen-coop, Hop-kiln, and Cooling-pit. His brothers, and their families, live nearby. Like many in Lancaster County, they all have Fields planted to Hops and Hemp. Each Crop, for its own reasons of Peace and War, is in rapidly growing demand, and fetching good prices. (359-60)

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<sup>23</sup> A further, and important, consequence of this narrating intimacy is that the reader, whose response is cued by the narrator, also feels a sense of closeness to the Redzingers at this juncture.

This style, *sans* an overt Cherrycokean presence, continues for one more paragraph, summarising the legal situation in which the Redzingers find themselves.

There is, however, an interesting parenthetical intrusion during this paragraph, when the narrator is describing the legal procedure by which the Redzinger's neighbour, Grodt, plans to appropriate their land: "(Many were the elephantine tracts swallowed at one nibble, in those times, by the country Mice thereabouts.)" As I have discussed, parentheses in *Mason & Dixon* often (though by no means always) imply a shifting diegetic level, meaning readers are always alert to this possibility. The parenthetical comment here *can*, in this respect, be read as a direct comment by Cherrycoke to his audience in Philadelphia (despite its lacking quotation marks, because such typographical clues are, we already know, unreliable). There is no absolute case to be made for this, and my point is not to argue one; rather, it reflects the wholesale fluidity of level and voice in operation here (and throughout) that we perceive at least the possibility of Cherrycoke's voice: it *does sound* like him, and it also sounds like the kind of information he enjoys imparting to the LeSpark children.<sup>24</sup>

The passage comes to a close with Cherrycoke's narrating presence returning to prominence, with his pronoun and voice again represented in the narration, although as always this is in a certain conflict with a modern sensibility, especially when "French Claret" is described as "that favor'd stupeficient of the jump'd-up tradesman," and when Mr. Edgewise is imagined giving a subjunctive speech that concludes: "All else after that ["the second Day of Creation"], in all History, is but Sub-Division" (361). Cherrycoke's late-night musings, which I have discussed, bring this chapter to an end. It is the chapter in which Cherrycoke's narrating voice is more discernible than in any other extended passage in the novel, but this is always

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<sup>24</sup> That said, it also *sounds* like the kind of information Pynchon's narrators generally like to impart, when they are "close" to their author and his apparent penchant for assimilating interesting, and obscure, data.



only at the behest of the primary narrator, who reminds us throughout that his voice is merely expressing its ability to assimilate Cherrycoke's, whose voice constitutes simply one element of the potentially infinite subjectivities that this narrator, uncircumscribed by "identity," may freely, and without contradiction, access and express.

### **At Octarara**

Chapter thirty-six sees Cherrycoke's coach, and subsequently Mason and Dixon, arriving at the Knockwood's inn. The first two paragraphs are radically ambiguous in terms of the narrator's and Cherrycoke's presence. The first contains the pronouns "us" and "[w]e," diectically identifying Cherrycoke's voice, but the precise and contained syntax *sounds* like that of the narrator; by contrast, the second paragraph *sounds* more like Cherrycoke's voice, with its first sentence eight lines long and consisting of a succession of ideas, building upon each other in the manner of his speech, but, being devoid of pronouns and containing non-specific deictic references, such as "seems," "lost to the eye," and "recalling," it implies thereby more an external narrating authority. Furthermore, the final reference to "bed-linens that haven't yet been romp'd, or even slept among," with its bawdy reference, further undermines the suggestion of Cherrycoke's narrating this to the LeSpark household (although it might also be argued that here we have an example of Cherrycoke's own capacity for double-voiced narration, intending two different interpretations of this line, one for the children and one for the adults) (362).

The narrative's return to Mason and Dixon, making their way to Octarara on the following page, sees the narrator also return to his typical voice. After a one sentence introduction, the protagonists enjoy a dialogue of nine speeches, with only one narrating intrusion ("Mason remarks" after his opening comment). The dual presence of both the narrator's and Cherrycoke's voices is manifest again, however, with the former's fading and the latter's homing into view, when, at the end of the Mason/Dixon dialogue,

Bickering energetickally, they make their way toward the lights and at length enter the very Inn where your Narrator, lately arriv'd, is already down a Pipe and a Pint,— only to be brought to dumbfounded silence at the Sight of one whom they've not seen since the Cape of Good Hope. (363)

The voice here begins as the primary narrator's, but (and this is the *point*), without apparent linguistic discord Cherrycoke's voice and presence merge into that voice with the words "your Narrator." To be clear: Cherrycoke's narrating presence has been off-stage since the previous line break (and before that, since the beginning of chapter thirty-six, he has only been partially discernible within the narrator's voice), but with this cue to the reader the narrator's voice simply *becomes* Cherrycoke's, signifying again his ability to assimilate and represent.

This kind of fundamental plurality is again present, in different form, at the end of the ensuing conversation between Mason, Dixon and Cherrycoke, with this semi-mystical description of the inn and its inhabitants:

As torch- or taper-light takes over from the light of the sunset, what are those Faces, gather'd before some Window, raising Toasts, preparing for the Evening ahead, if not assur'd of life forever? as travelers come in by ones and twos, to smells of Tobacco and Chops, as Fiddle Players tune their strings and starv'd horses eat from the trough in the Courtyard, as young women flee to and fro dumb with fatigue, and small boys down in strata of their own go swarming upon ceaseless errands, skidding upon the Straw, as smoke begins to fill the smoking-room...how may Death come here? (364)

This is the narrator assuming a tone of deep seriousness and metaphysical longing, genuinely free from irony and intended to be read as such. Discomfort at, and incomprehension of death, however, is a decidedly Cherrycokean theme, as we have learned early in the novel with Cherrycoke's Scheherazade-role in the LeSpark family saving him, day by day, from eviction outdoors, "where waits the Winter's Block and Blade" (7), and with his seemingly obsessive visits to Mason's grave:

The Verger has taken to nodding at him. In the middle of the night recently he awoke convinc'd that 'twas he who had been haunting Mason,— that like a shade with a grievance, he expected Mason, but newly arriv'd at Death, to help him with something. (8)

This obsession with mortality also profoundly informs the description of the *Seahorse's* battle, which runs between the diegetic and metadiegetic contexts, and is articulated clearly in this centre of consciousness description of Cherrycoke's thoughts inside the frame context:

One reason Humans remain young so long, compar'd to other Creatures, is that the young are useful in many ways, among them in providing daily, by way of the evil Creatures and Slaughter they love, a Denial of Mortality clamorous enough to allow their Elders release, if only for moments at a time, from Its Claims upon the Attention. (37)

Death is of course an abiding, fundamental theme in the novel, which will largely occupy my discussion in the following chapter. At this point, however, it is worth noting how this theme, which reflects emphatically Cherrycoke's psyche, is dealt with in a voice from which his is absent: the perspective in the quote above is filmic, viewing the customers at the inn through the windows from the outside, then moving unimpeded throughout the various precincts of the building, recording the images, sounds and smells of the scene. This reflects the kind of subtle strategies of translation that operate within the novel: it is in effect decoding the kind of filmic image that is here evoked as, in that context, functioning as life-affirming and death-denying. In film this message is signified through the semiotics of the screen; in the novel it is interpreted, and articulated, in prose.

Following this, in a typically abrupt change of tone, the narrator presents "Mr. Knockwood, the landlord, a sort of trans-Elemental Uncle Toby, [who] spends hours every day not with Earth Fortifications, but studying rather the passage of Water across his land, and constructing elaborate works to divert its flow...." Cherrycoke's speaking presence is wholly absent from this paragraph, firstly because references to Laurence Sterne (especially given the frame conversation I have alluded to) are hardly conceivable as welcome in the piety of the LeSpark household, and, more emphatically, because of the gross anachronism involved in the narrator putting a version of chaos theory into the mouth of Mr. Knockwood, with his belief that:

“–all that has to happen is some Beaver, miles upstream from here, moves a single Pebble, – suddenly, down here, everything’s changed! The creek’s a mile away, running through the Horse Barn! Acres of Forest no longer exist! And that Beaver don’t even know what he’s done!” (364)

From this point on Cherrycoke’s voice is absent from the narrator’s discourse as he provides an account of the snowed-in antics at the Knockwoods’, which occupies the remainder of chapter thirty-six, includes Armand’s story in chapter thirty-seven, continues throughout chapter thirty-eight, and only concludes on the third page of chapter thirty-nine, when “the Snow abates enough to allow them [Mason and Dixon] to rejoin the Harlands” (393). The only overt reference to Cherrycoke’s speaking voice during this time comes on the last of these twenty eight pages, in a parenthetical use of a pronoun, when Mason notes Dixon’s growing corporation:

...his [Mason’s] eyes happening to fall upon Dixon’s Stomach, whose size and curvature seem different to him, somehow (the Figure of it indeed changing, one day to the next, the rest of us watching in some alarm its Transition from a Spheroid vertically dispos’d, to one more wide than high). (392)

### Cherrycoke Throughout

The kinds of clearly marked Cherrycokean influences we have encountered in this critical series of chapters (which falls almost precisely in the centre of the novel) are also found at various points throughout *Mason & Dixon*, though with far less frequency. For example, his pronoun is found in parentheses, without quotation marks, also on pages 247 and 519. On the former occasion, Mason is mourning Bradley’s death and Dixon is consoling him over drinks before the pair leaves for America. Mason recalls Bradley’s presence at Plymouth before the departure for Cape Town and after the letter of chastisement from the Royal Society (which hurt Mason deeply). The passage reads:

Mason’s Brow clearly unhappy. “I believe he had come to apologize,” giving away this solemn confidence snappily as another might the Punch-Line of a Joak (for as I often noted, no matter what Sentiments might lie ‘pon his Phiz,

Mr. Mason was in the Habit of delivering even his gravest Speeches, with the Rhythms and Inflections of the Taproom Comedian).

The purpose or effect of this intrusion of (presumably) Cherrycoke's pronoun is open to debate, but in terms of my current discussion it acts as another unprecedented use of typography and voice to play havoc with rigid conceptions of the novel's narrating mechanics. The second example, which occurs during the first chapter of Eliza Fields' story, is even more unsettling, in the first place because the content of the passage is generally obscene<sup>25</sup> and in his parenthetical remark Cherrycoke is commenting on this song, sung by Sister Blondelle:

Soldiers like Ramrods, and Sailors like Spars,  
 Mechanicks and Nabobs, and Gents behind Bars,  
 Girls, there's no sort of Fellow I've ever pass'd by, —  
 Not even those Coolies, out there in Shang-hai....  
 'Tis...  
 [Chorus]  
 Men have the Sterling, and sixpences too,  
 So be where there's men, and 'tis meal-time for you,  
 Mind the Equipment as long as you can,  
 And don't sell yourself cheap, to some cheese-paring Man.

Ever since Adam stepp'd out of Eve's Sight,  
 And didn't get back till the following Night,  
 Men have been lying to Women they bed,  
 Care-free as felons, yet easy to shed, singing, —  
 [Chorus] (518-9)

Furthermore, as we learn in the following chapter, this story is being read in *The Ghastly Fop* — as well as, apparently, being narrated by Cherrycoke. The paradoxes are, of course, here and throughout, intractable.

Other such ambiguous markers of Cherrycoke's presence are found when the narrative specifically addresses the "Children" (48, 258, 524), the

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<sup>25</sup> On the following page, for example, we have a description of the "Las Viudas Cilice," a "Hothouse Rose, deep red, nearly black, whose supple, long Stem is expertly twisted into a Breech-clout, to pass between the Labia as well as 'round the Waist, with the Blossom, preferably one just about to open, resting behind, in that charming Cusp of moistness and heat, where odors of the Body and the Rose may mingle with a few drops of Blood from the tiny green Thorns, and Flashes of Pain whose true painfulness must be left for the Penitent to assess" (520).

first of which instances I have discussed, while on both other occasions the narrator is also using the past tense, momentarily bringing Cherrycoke's narrating presence into focus, although of course this is questioned by the surrounding context – indeed the second of these also occurs during the first of the Eliza Fields chapters, emphasising again the narrating ambiguity there.

Another type of ambiguity is found on page 341, after one of the typographically unmediated frame incursions already mentioned, when the narrator responds to the subject matter of that frame conversation: Ives suggests that Mason went to Lancaster Town alone, but Cherrycoke tells him that “at the last moment” Dixon decided to go also. The narrator returns to the main story with this reflexive comment: “They – presume ‘they’,” implying a dialogue between the two situations. A similar example is found on page 698, where the narrator's “Say then” responds to an objection from frame characters that intrudes parenthetically, implying a certain communion between the narrative levels. Then, on page 682, the mention of “another eleven-day Spin” refers back to Cherrycoke's bizarre theory relating to “the famous Eleven Missing Days of the Calendar Reform of ‘52,” elaborated earlier in the frame context (554-5), and a few lines later a paragraph beginning “In fact” also implies his speaking presence.

A more epistemologically paradoxical moment is found on page 408, when Mason is in New York with the Sons of Liberty, who remind him of the treatment Stroud weavers have experienced at the hands of the British government and army. We are privy to a quote from Cherrycoke's Day-Book (although he is absent from the scene), which begins with the query: “Who are they that will send violent young troops against their own people?” (407). At the end of this passage one of the Sons, Captain Volcanoe, seems to respond directly to Cherrycoke's enquiry: “We shall all of us learn, who they are, and all too soon” (408). The sheer illogicality of this is in keeping with the examples we have been noting and further in keeping with the carefully manipulated, consistently paradoxical procedures of the novel at large.

These examples, obviously, are arguable in terms of their signifying functions, and their discovery in the text is seemingly endless: I have listed here interesting moments of a *clear* Cherrycokean presence and have evoked the epistemological paradoxes these throw up in terms of the demarcations among diegetic levels and diegetic voices, but Cherrycoke's pervasive influence means that the perception of other such moments of his discernible influence and fluidity are forever possible within any subjective reading, and for the sake of my readers' patience it behoves me to assume that the point—the narrator's ability to evoke Cherrycoke's presence at will, in any context—has been taken.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted, furthermore, that while I am here drawing specific attention to moments of overt paradox, I mean ultimately to advocate a reading sensibility that is more or less unconcerned by these paradoxes as such. The important point, from the perspective I am arguing, is that the deconstruction of a single, human narrating subjectivity in the novel dismantles the kind of epistemic paradigms that I am calling up as I attempt to describe as much what the novel *does not do* as what it does. To recall the film analogy, in that medium, even when a story is putatively narrated, viewers are more willing to accept these kinds of paradoxical instances and read them in purely aesthetic, rather than intellectual or reflective terms: this is how *Mason & Dixon* also demands to be read. The kinds of paradox I am drawing attention to here (which are no more than fleeting moments inside a huge novel) serve mostly to reaffirm the radical narrating fluidity that allows the novel and its readers to free themselves from the hegemony of epistemological questions built into a realist tradition that has been confined by a signifying supremacy conferred upon individual subjective agents.

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<sup>26</sup> Particularly fruitful areas to look for a vague sense of Cherrycoke's presence are, as I have suggested, at moments of past tense narration and in parenthetical asides: the former, as I have commented, lend to the narrative a verbal register, reminding us at times of Cherrycoke's putative narrating function; the latter are often used—as one might expect—to provide additional information, flashforwards and clarifications, all of which can on occasion be read as Cherrycokean. Of course at other times parenthetical information is decidedly unCherrycokean, such as the renaming of God as "Thatwhichever Created Earth and her Rate of Spin" (141-2), or when the parenthetical voice comments on Cherrycoke's act of narration (153, 195).

## Cherrycoke Concluded

In terms of the narrative's representation or simulation of Cherrycoke's presence within the narrating consciousness, I have done little more here than scratch the surface, because I have attempted to deal with the overt textual indicators of this presence, in keeping with my emphasis here on matters of diegetic level and voice. The broader implications of my argument, though, which I will only deal with here in a superficial manner, go much deeper than this. This is because, as I have been emphasising throughout, the simulations of the novel, from its image of eighteenth-century English to its rendering of a *version* of Cherrrycoke's story, and beyond, are self-consciously posited as translations of an unknowable other, which, in that, need exhibit no faithfulness to that other: it is a lost, indeed non-existent, artifact that places no emphatic demands on the simulated version of it. Thus, for example, while I have made various arguments above relating to the improbability of certain utterances belonging to Cherrycoke because their content is either obscene or reflects a modern-day consciousness, these arguments are only useful in the realist framework I have heuristically maintained for the sake of explicating the deconstructive antics of the novel at moments where it at least *seems* to be appealing to such realism. In a deeper sense, though, readers are aware throughout their reading that the main story of *Mason & Dixon* is not beholden to such realism and that, as merely simulation, this story of *Cherrycoke's* can be obscene or anachronistic and still be *his* to the extent that we know that it is also not *the* story (that other, lost, inaccessible, powerless story) that he relates to the LeSpark family. It remains *his* in this respect, despite being told in a voice that is not his, despite relating information he would not relate, despite being controlled by a consciousness born two hundred years after him, and despite his original story being one that has never existed and will never exist. This is all true because a translation is



radically free from its original,<sup>27</sup> especially when the original is radically other because it is fundamentally absent.

I have concentrated in the above argument, then, on the linguistic manifestations of Cherrycoke's presence within a certain realist framework, which is reasonable in terms of my argument here because this argument is based around how *Mason & Dixon* simultaneously evokes and disrupts the expectations implicit in this framework, primarily through the most fundamental textual modes involved in the signification of level and voice. If I were to go deeper into the matter of representation in respect to Cherrycoke, however, there are two more obvious areas I should approach, which are manifest in the Octarara passage I have been discussing and which I will mention here briefly. The first of these relates to the representation of the younger Cherrycoke within the main story. Clearly these representations are pregnant with significance because they immediately point to Cherrycoke's supposed homodiegetic position as a narrator. As I argued earlier in this chapter, the homodiegetic status is important because it involves the narrator in a dialogue with their narrated selves, which naturally throws up a fruitful tension informing our reading attitudes. In *Mason & Dixon*, then, based on what I have been arguing here, this involves another double translation: Cherrycoke's representations of himself within the frame setting (his representations of his younger self in his oral narrative that does not exist) are translated into representations of those representations by the controlling narrator. In terms of the aesthetics of the novel and our reading of Cherrycoke (a fascinating figure whom I have no space to deal with in any depth) this double translation must provide fruitful ground for analysis, particularly, perhaps, in respect to some of the narrating moves I have been discussing here. That is, even a cursory examination tells us that the extent to which Cherrycoke's voice is present influences, or opens up for discussion, the ways his character is represented in the novel: contrast, for example, the second

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<sup>27</sup> This is the point Walter Benjamin makes regarding real translations in his essay "The Task of the Translator."

appearance of Cherrycoke (the first is on the previous page) in the main story as the “helpful young Rev<sup>d</sup> Wicks Cherrycoke” (36) with the self-deprecatory representations of himself where he “can only mumble and blurt [...] her innocent attention has reach’d unto the dead Vacuum ever at the bottom of my soul, – humiliation absolute” (356) in this extract from the chapter thirty-five passages I discussed above. Or consider his later appearance, which emanates directly from a parenthetical frame discussion, where he is talking to Mason while “[s]quatting over [a] noisome Trench” and then “wip[ing] his Arse with a handful of Clover” (537-8).

The second area of interest I will mention here is in terms of Cherrycoke’s writings throughout the novel, how these are invested with an anachronistic image of his consciousness, how these inform the morality of the novel, and how these vary in these respects depending on their textual placement. I have already discussed briefly the passage at the end of chapter thirty-five and noted its recollection of *Gravity’s Rainbow*; this seems to mark a trend in the novel whereby excerpts from Cherrycoke’s writing that appear within a chapter are of a more modern consciousness than those that are used in an epigraphical placement at the beginning of a chapter. Certainly these passages have an important signifying role in the novel and reveal much about the position Cherrycoke holds in it as the voice of Western conscience: he evinces, that is, a deep historical morality that spans, through the kinds of anachronist procedures I have discussed, the philosophical and moral quandaries of humanist Christianity and late modernity. Also, it is worth noting that these excerpts have a privileged position in the novel, along with Timothy Tox’s verse, as the only “primary texts” that are quoted in an epigraphical position, rendering them, by a certain implication, free from narratorial control.

My interest in commenting on these features, while not investigating them in depth, lies in how they point to the multi-layered extent of self-conscious representation that is the abiding signifying aesthetic of the novel. Representations are built on representations, while the putative original,

which we increasingly conceive of as inaccessible and radically other, slides further into obscurity. The novel, then, demands to be read in the surface (screen-like) manner this implies: the reading experience must be one that finds meaning in the mode of representation at the given point, which interprets the denotative content in respect to that mode, and which is fundamentally disinterested in expectations of the real being accessible through the means of representation. This is not an intellectual, philosophical, conclusion; rather it is necessitated by the narrating procedures that I have discussed, which irreversibly deny the possibility of the real. There is, in this narratologically fastidious disestablishment of narrating singularity, consciousness and voice, literally nothing outside the text: the text itself informs us how to read, and the language it employs requires that we fulfill it through the conscious projection of our cultural and reading sensibilities, actively engaging with its ever-changing voice in an act less of understanding than of sympathy.

I have discussed the relationship between the voices of the ubiquitous primary narrator and Cherrycoke in some depth to indicate how the novel establishes its signifying procedures, but, as I have indicated, this is merely the enabling factor for the wholesale freedoms these procedures enjoy: the importance of Cherrycoke in this respect is that, despite his constant potential within the narrative, he does not saturate the potential of that narrative. That is, having thoroughly established its freedom in terms of level and voice, that freedom is not, cannot be, wholly satisfied by the levels and voices of Cherrycoke: this latter is only at best, as I have shown, a partial presence within a constantly self-redefining voice, a voice that requires therefore to be fulfilled by further subjectivities and consciousnesses, and by its textual representations of these. Retaining my commitment to the obvious, then, I will now turn my attention to how these representations become manifest in the privileged sphere of putative meta-metadiegetic narratives, where we will find the same kinds of diegetic fluidity of level and voice that we have already

examined, but our emphasis here will be on the varied modes of representation that are called up within these contexts.

### **An Arm and a Leg**

Because *Mason & Dixon* manifests its narrating procedures so thoroughly through the fluidity of level and voice that it establishes in respect to the primary instance of Cherrycoke, when it comes to narrative digressions that occur within Cherrycoke's story, such fluidity is apprehended by readers with ease: the original deconstructive moves have, that is, tuned our reading sensibilities to this representational programme involving multiplicity of narrating place and plurality of narrating person. While the screen analogy is vital to the initial narrative set-up (and the film aesthetic it bespeaks is, certainly, of intermittent importance in the novel generally), as we proceed further into the depths of *Mason & Dixon*, consciousness of this analogy, in itself, is far less critical to our reading approach. The novel has, that is, passed well beyond the foregrounding of its formal procedures and it, as well as its readers, enjoy the freedom to explore the signifying potential these procedures institute.

In this discussion we have already seen plenty of evidence of this, which has arisen in the course of analyses directed primarily in other areas. Thus, for example, I have alluded to the Learned English Dog, who makes his appearance early in the main story as a street-side performer and functions as an indicator of the fantastical content we can expect throughout the novel. We have seen the song that functions as Cherrycoke's inward lament (and songs of various tones and meters indicate the mood of many a passage in the novel); we have noted the intrusion of a comically foppish voice, unidentified and unheralded, lamenting to his friend, Cedric, the "predictably Colonial" problem of intractable geography; then, following this, we have seen an equally unprecedented, equally entertaining conversation between the brothers Charles II and James II. I have referred to the eighteenth-century version of a tardis and a thermos flask appearing in Cherrycoke's journey to

Octarara, as well as to the absurd image of a German farmer finding a new religious illumination whilst drowning in a pit of hops, which is related during the same journey. We examined briefly an evocative and serious meditation on life and death. I mentioned in a footnote Squire Haligast's inspired vulgarisation of theology, which defines consubstantiation in terms of Lord Sandwich's "great modern Advance in Diet" (367), and I alluded passingly to Mason's unlikely two nights spent with the Sons of Liberty in New York, a passage that mingles ironic views of thuggishness with resonant reflections on power and its uses. Finally, I have found myself returning often in passing to the captivity narrative of Eliza Fields, which ranges in tone from a celebration of pastoral Puritanism to heretical lasciviousness and then to a meditation on the cultural difficulties inherent in Sino-Western relationships, all in the course of the story of this woman being captured by Indians and traded to become a Widow Of Christ at a Jesuit College in Quebec (presumably based on the genuine Jesuit College of Our Lady of the Angels in the same city, which was in the process of being shut down around the time the Mason-Dixon line was being drawn). This collection of images arose here because of their interest to a general discussion of narrating technique, not primarily because of their thematic or aesthetic qualities, suggesting the extent of representations *Mason & Dixon's* narration enjoys by way of the narrating fluidity that I am examining here.

By maintaining the trajectory of this discussion to date, then, it is logical that I move into the realm of narratives within the main narrative, and I will begin with Armand Allegre's "Iliad of Inconvenience," his story of becoming involved in the intrigue surrounding Jacques de Vaucanson's mechanical duck gaining sexual and spiritual awareness as well as developing astonishing physical powers and eventually a crush on the French chef himself, leading to the latter's decampment from Paris to Philadelphia where he meets Mason and Dixon at the Knockwood's and joins the party as they embark on drawing the west line. The choice of this digression as a starting point, while it is not the first in the novel, is justified in two respects:

firstly, from a purely pragmatic point of view, it falls in the middle (chapter thirty-seven) of the passage at Octarara, which I have dealt with above in some depth; it is also a paradigmatic example, being an extended digression that occupies an entire chapter, and in that sense will provide us with some key terms of reference. My reading here, as with the analyses of further digressions that will follow, aims to elaborate, firstly, on issues of typography and narrating voice, tying the discussion to my foregoing analysis, and, secondly, to look at this issue of voice more closely in terms of its textual representations of cultural modes of signification, which indicate to us the reading sensibilities it calls for.

At Armand's first appearance, his voice is characterised by a rendering both of his accent, in the first instance, and his francophone grammar and vocabulary. Thus, his displeasure at hearing mention of a sandwich propels him onto the stage: "Sond-weech-uh! Son-weech-uh! To the Sacrament of Eating, it is ever the grand Insult!" (366). He is then challenged by the quarrelsome (and xenophobic) fop, Philip Dimdown, who reaches for his sword. Armand responds: "Had I my *batterie des couteaux*, before that ridiculous little blade is out of his sheath, I can bone you, — like the Veal!" (367). His misuse of the present tense "can" for "could" in this subjunctive clause, and his employment of a definite article before a generic use of an uncountable noun, both identify his speech as "foreign," and we read into this a simulation of a French accent, with its "charming" continental air. In his conversation with Luise Redzinger two pages later his speech is possibly less inflected with this accent, but his gestures (shrugging and grasping his cheeks), as well as his melodrama (describing himself as "the face of Melancholy") all serve to dramatise this clichéd presentation of a "typical" Frenchman. It is interesting, then, in terms of our recent discussion, that as he begins to recite his story at the beginning of the next chapter his words *are* within quotation marks, *but* the characteristic Frenchness is missing from this voice:

"I was the youngest of four brothers. Each of us, one by one, was well placed in life, until my turn came, — when, our Father's Fortunes' having experienc'd an unforeseen reversal, there remain'd only money enough to send me to Paris and apprentice me to the greatest chef in France, — which is to say, in the World. — " (371)<sup>28</sup>

After an interruption by his audience, Armand's story continues, *without quotation marks* and with the by-now-familiar parenthetical narrator's comment, "(the Frenchman goes on)." Armand's characteristically French voice is totally absent throughout,<sup>29</sup> only marked by the occasional use of French phrases, with off-hand English colloquialisms such as, "until, one day, at last, I had become a Chef. And presently, as these things unfold, Paris was at my feet," followed by the self-deprecatory tone of the practiced raconteur: "I'll say it for you, — poor Paris!"

As we might expect, then, the main narrator is here representing Armand's story for him, and the original slides into irrelevance. However, interestingly, this narrative retains the past tense throughout, and the speaking voice is, therefore, marked with a clear sense of story-telling: there is less of a feel, consequently, of a screen-like slippage into another scene, but rather this passage reads *as* an oral narrative — only not precisely Armand's, but instead an oral version of his oral original. Indeed, Armand's first-person pronoun is retained throughout, but the voice that describes, for example, the critical move that sent "it [the duck] out the Gates of the Inanimate, and off upon its present Journey into the given World" (372), reads unavoidably as that of the novel's main narrator: "Vaucanson's vainglorious Intent had been

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<sup>28</sup> This contrasts with the earlier example of Cherrycoke's beginning, where his voice retains a presence even in the early moments after the quotation marks have been removed.

<sup>29</sup> We can also see this eliding of a language problem in the case of most of Captain Zhang's speech, which contrasts with his first appearance outside the Eliza Fields narrative, when he opens chapter fifty-five with this Jackie Chan-type ejaculation: "Terrible *Feng-Shui* here. Worst I ever saw. You two crazy?" (542). It further recalls a similar act of representation in *Gravity's Rainbow* where it is often unclear (and hence irrelevant) what language is being spoken by French, Dutch, German, Russian, Japanese, English and American characters as they converse with each other in that novel.

to repeat for Sex and Reproduction, the Miracles he'd already achiev'd for Digestion and Excretion" (373).<sup>30</sup>

The narrator's double-function here is emphasised when he interrupts his telling of Armand's story, with no typographical modulation, and returns to describing the scene at the inn: "At this point Armand catches sight of Mason and Dixon, who are attempting to bring their Breakfast to an undisturb'd corner of the Saloon" (372). This return to the novel's main narrative form is retained for another half page, with quoted dialogue predominating, until Armand's story continues and his putative ownership of the narrative is affirmed by another parenthetical reminder: "What I was told then (Armand continues)..." (373). At the end of this paragraph, though, there is yet another interruption from the floor of the inn, after which the story continues, all without any management by the narrator. This pattern continues, but an intrusion by Mason, agreeing with the duck's view of his sexual gift from Vaucanson, "that I might not miss what I never possess'd," *is* contained within parentheses (376). In terms of the narrating voice, then, this passage calls up the patterns we are now familiar with to unproblematically present it as an orally recounted story (that is, using the past tense) but in the pervasive voice of the narrator, who speaks Armand's presence through pronouns and with French vocabulary, but who at the same time retains his own voice and fluid signifying modes. Let us now examine how these latter operate within the story.

A brief summary of Armand's "Iliad of Inconvenience" is a useful place to start. Being the greatest chef in France, famed for his duck recipes, he becomes the target for Vaucanson's duck's resentment at the world and is enlisted by the detective, Hervé du T. (Heavy Duty?), who is responsible for recapturing the fugitive automaton, to act as a decoy for the duck's capture.

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<sup>30</sup> Vaucanson did, in fact, have his mechanical duck consume grains and produce excrement, but it was discovered that the "digestive process" was fraudulent and the excrement had been pre-prepared. Similarly, Armand's good-faith reference (when speaking in quotation marks) to Voltaire's description of Vaucanson as a Prometheus (372) misses the contemptuous irony of the original remark.



However, the duck visits Armand and proposes that the chef do him a favour: speak with Vaucanson and request that the duck may court (being now sexually aware) her double, Vaucanson's back-up model. Armand's attempts to contact Vaucanson lead to his social ostracism and to intrigue in the Parisian society, where he is soon embroiled in wild, alcohol and drug fuelled partying. Meanwhile the duck has redirected her passion to Armand himself and pursues him unrelentingly, aided by her super-human abilities of flight at tremendous speeds, enormous strength, and invisibility, talents which she also turns to the protection of Armand, who has become the object of violent, anonymous attacks, for, as with the V2 in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the duck has become coveted by those "whose Fortunes would have intermesh'd more and less naturally with those of any Flying Automaton..." (377). Humiliated and now friendless, Armand resolves to leave for Pennsylvania and hopefully escape the besotted fowl, although, as we learn subsequent to his story, she has followed him to the new world and becomes, indeed, a recurrent character for the remainder of the novel.

All this is not, as the duck claims, "Italian opera," nor, as Armand counters, "French tragedy" (377); rather it is French slapstick, or, depending on the given tone, melodrama (Armand would have it seem the latter, while the narrator's influence renders it as the former: we read it, alternately, as both). That is, the logic of the causation among events is not as important as their outlandishness, ridiculousness and imaginative power, and the succession of dramatic and outrageous images, as also with, say, an action movie,<sup>31</sup> dominates over any questioning of their reasonableness or credibility (even if we accept, as we must, the insane premise).

The story is, actually, dominated more by dialogue than narrative, and the critical figure throughout, who sets in motion the various happenings, is of course the duck herself. Because of its inherent absurdity, it is difficult to read in good faith this story of a lonely precursor to Frankenstein's monster,

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, machines gaining self-awareness and threatening humanity is a popular theme in science fiction film, for example the *Terminator* and *The Matrix* series.

yet the melodrama in fact requires this level of sympathetic engagement, along with the humour and fun its utter ridiculousness inspires; there is, in other words, a dual reading sensibility required here, which alternates between amusement and peculiar emotional involvement. It is in fact a story of classic narcissism, with the duck's alienation leading her to violent swings between aggressive arrogance and pathetic neediness; to overweening arrogation of status; to aggrandising self-definition in terms of elevated institutions; to unreasonable bouts of jealousy; and to simplistic conceptions of a life in which she is the only feeling subject.<sup>32</sup> The narcissistic subject, trapped within their self-obsession, is, given the traces we all carry of this, a figure whose effect on others fluctuates between intense annoyance or frustration and profound sympathy, and by reading the duck's dialogue with sensitivity we can appreciate this.

Thus, at the duck's first appearance she is inflated with her self-proclaimed purpose as the avenger of all ducks, having quite arbitrarily selected Armand as her enemy. She is driven by a delusional sense of purpose and righteousness, although there is a decidedly comic element to the rendering of this: "'So,' spray'd the Duck, — 'the terrible Bluebeard of the Kitchen, whose celebrity is purchas'd with the lives of my Race. Not so brave now, eh?'" (375). She also exhibits the classic paranoia of the narcissist, apparently unaware of her metallic body when Armand offers her his friendship: "At least until you contrive to make a dish of me, eh?" Within moments, however, she reveals another narcissistic trait, abandoning her supposed devotion to all ducks, opting instead to use Armand for the fulfillment of her own desires (376). Immediately after this she indulges the narcissistic impulse towards ridicule followed by self-effacement and the adoption of an attitude of helplessness (which is, for readers, entertaining in its tremendous absurdity). Armand has just suggested that she, like Vaucanson, engage an attorney:

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<sup>32</sup> An account of clinical narcissism can be found in the DSM IV, American Psychiatric Association 658-61. For an account of narcissistic figures in literature, see Bouson.

"You wish me," the Duck spreading its wings as if to invite inspection, "to walk in, hand him my Card, 'How d'ye do, spot of bother with the Human who design'd me'? – I think not. Withal, my Case would be weak, – he would no doubt present me as some poor Wretch ever connected, by way of this celebrated inner Apparatus, to Earth, but to nothing as transcendent as," – a wing-shrug, – "*l'Amour* – ...."

The duck goes on to illustrate her pretentious attachment to elevated institutions and her simplistic understanding of life, expressing her desire to take the back-up duck "out for the evening, – I have tickets to the Opera, – 'tis Galuppi's *Margherita e Don Aldo*. We could stop for a bite at L'Appeau, they have my table there, you must know of Jean-Luc's *Insectes d'Etang à l'Etouffée*, – " (377). She goes further with this idealised view of life, seen through the lenses of opera, identifying herself in a leading role and dismissing Armand's concern at the impracticalities of her plan:

"Why should Vaucanson agree? If he is your enemy, he may also demand a price, such as your return to his Atelier."

"Details for you to work out. In Italian opera, the young Soprano's Guardian may always be deceiv'd." The Duck flapp'd its Wings, rose in the Air, and with a Hum, singing a few bars of "*Calmati, Mio Don Aldo irascibile*," crank'd up to speed and vanish'd.

This demonstrates, its humour notwithstanding, a narcissistic self-image of absolute centrality and importance, coupled with a total inability to perceive the realities of others' problems or points of view.

Despite these unpleasant qualities, however, the duck, like the human narcissist, enjoys our sympathy at her being unable to escape her solipsistic delusions and limitations. Her isolation from a social context and her clear misunderstanding of the life she has fallen into mean she will cling to whatever potential she finds for affirmation (or, in clinical terms, narcissistic supply). This she gets from Armand, leading her to transfer her erotic (and existential) desires onto him, becoming his "Protection unseen, yet potent" (379). Within the bizarre relationship that then develops between the two she becomes a quite pathetic figure, clinging to the object of her obsession, growing "jealous, imagining that I was seeking the company of some other Duck..." (380), yet revealing also a certain shame at her manipulations: "We

mate for life. Alas, my poor Armand.” In her final speech of the story, she reveals all her self-obsession, aggressiveness, unreasonable demands and paranoid envy. Armand reminds her of the back-up duck:

“Aha! My Virgin Double, — somewhere upon a Shelf, in one of Vaucanson’s many clandestine workshops, oh yes and by the way, what progress have you made, upon that simple Errand, wait, let me guess, — another barrier arisen? another note gone astray? or is it something more sinister, such as your desire to have the other for yourself? Eh? Look, he sweats, he trembles. Admit it, Betrayed.”

Through the remainder of the novel, the duck performs this narcissistic role, alternating between aggressive jealousy and resigned abandonment of the human world, producing newspaper clippings about her earlier fame to show to all who will listen, and suggesting to the reader, in her reflections on Vaucanson, that she is the victim, ultimately, of *his* narcissism (668-9). Eventually she finds an occupation fitting her inability to survive within the social, which is, nonetheless, certainly more attractive than being cast adrift on a iceberg: circling the earth at high velocity, “cruising the line” (667), she becomes finally a lonely figure and indefatigable reminder of our own individual isolation, which we sublimate through such social fictions as community and the sentimental.

## Stig

Armand’s story is just one of many throughout *Mason & Dixon* where a speaker’s voice merges into or is taken over by that of the main narrator, while the latter retains, to a greater or lesser degree, a simulated sense of the former’s presence, either in his voice or in the tone he adopts. There is always an abiding sense of translation, which may reflect, reflect on, or refract the unknown original. Minor examples of this include Gershom’s jokes (284-5), Franklin’s description of the Jesuit Telegraph (287-8), Nicholas’s story of the giant hemp plant (654-5) and a one-sentence history of Saint Brendan’s well (725). More extended examples include Dixon’s story of Emerson’s watch (317-8); the story of Tom Hynes and Catherine Wheat, introduced by an

anonymous speaker, which Pynchon lifts from the actual historical account and transforms into a parable of community that touches on both the ugly and uplifting potentials of that institution (575-584); Dixon's story of the Lambton worm, again taken from local myth, extemporised on, and presented in an ironic tone directed at a foolish sense of entitlement attributed to the titled classes, symbolised by the Crusades and John Lambton's belief that he can break an oath taken in foreign lands (587-594); Captain Shelby's story of the Devil's legal problems, an entertaining fable of celestial corporatism, legal pragmatism and enslavement – even for the greatest rebel of all – within the system of "His Omnipotence" (605-6); and Zhang's farcical tale of the Chinese astronomers, Hsi and Ho, again a traditional narrative, which, in its self-conscious representation of a parallel between these characters and Mason and Dixon (one irascible, the other concupiscent and gluttonous), resembles most closely in its narration the predominating style of most of the novel (623-628). These stories are told variously in the past or present tense, this choice, along with other stylistic considerations, informing how the narrator's voice is read in the given context.

In addition, I have already referred to the narratological complexities involved in the story of Eliza Fields, which I will not dwell on further. As well as this, the novel includes other such stories that are introduced by either Mason or Dixon, in addition to those listed above, which will inform my discussion in my next chapter. I would like to conclude this cursory examination of narratives within the narrative, though, with two further minor but interesting examples. The first, which comes second in the novel, is the one-page tale Stig tells to the prostitute, Patience Eggslap, of the Norwegian Thorfinn Karlsefni's settlement in America, which derives in substance from the Icelandic *Saga of Eric the Red* (633-4). In terms of our discussion in this chapter, this brief digression is interesting as something of a counter-example. In fact, this is a genuine meta-metadiegetic narrative, in the sense that Stig's words are contained throughout by quotation marks. However, like Armand, Stig portray's the ability to speak, even when quoted,

in a voice that is not his. Thus, for example, when he identifies himself as a covert agent working for the Swedish claim to Pennsylvania, his preceding simplistic utterances, “What is *this*?”; “Give it”; and “What does it mean, Indians?” (610), are transformed into the eloquence of the main narrator:

Very well. — I am here on behalf of certain Principals in Sweden, who believe that the Penns, being secretly creatures of Rome, took illegally the original Svånsen land 'pon which Philadelphia would later come to sit, — and thus that the whole Metropolis has never ceas'd to belong, rightfully, to Sweden. (611)

Similarly, at the end of his story to Mrs. Eggslap, he responds to her addressing him with his Nordic accent: “Yah, Pa-tience?” (634), which contrasts with the narrating voice he has just been using. By this point in the novel, with the kind of fluidity of voice that we have encountered, this may seem not particularly interesting, although it does witness, instead of a character's voice merging into that of the narrator, rather the narrator's voice merging into that of one of the characters. (In this respect we can also note that Stig tells his story for Mrs. Eggslap, until its penultimate paragraph, in the same present tense of the primary narrator.) Stig remains throughout the novel a mysterious character, aside from these two occasions mostly a muscular, silent presence: after his initial self-revelations, we witness this reaction: ““Stig,’ cries Mrs. Eggslap, ‘I had no idea! why, you can talk!’” (611). Because of this mysteriousness (the characters of this novel all have, emphatically, *characters*), Stig's narration of this story, with an-other's (the narrator's) voice, is intriguing in itself and, without intending to theorise it too deeply, I will give it a momentary examination.

In his initial revelations Stig refers to the Icelandic

Tales of the first Northmen in America, of those long Winters and the dread Miracles that must come to pass before Spring, — the Blood, the Ghosts and Fetches, the Prophecies and second Sight.... And the melancholy suggestion, that the 'new' Continent Europeans found, had been long attended, from its own ancient Days, by murder, slavery, and the poor fragments of a Magic irreparably broken. (612)

The 'Fetch' (apparition or doppelganger) Stig refers to takes a central place as the defining moment in his story to Mrs. Eggslap, describing the Scandinavians' encounters with the indigenous 'Skrællings':

"...Upon the second visit, Karlsefni's wife Gudrid is inside the House, tending Snorri the baby, when despite the new Palisado and the Sentries, a strange, small Woman comes in, announc'd only by her Shadow, fair-hair'd, pale, with the most enormous eyes Gudrid has ever seen, and asks, 'What is your Name?'

" 'My name is Gudrid,' replies Gudrid. 'What is your name?'

" 'My name is Gudrid,' she whispers, staring out of those Eyes. And all at once there is a violent crash, and the woman vanishes, — at the same Instant, outside, one of the Northmen, struggling with one of the Skraellings, who has tried to seize his weapon, kills him. With terrible cries, the other Skraellings run away, — the Northmen decide not to wait their return, but to go out to them, upon the Cape." (633)

He then relates the final battle with the Skraellings, where many of these people (presumably either Native Americans or Inuits) were killed, and goes on:

"...None but Gudrid ever saw the woman whose visit announc'd this first Act of American murder, and the collapse of Vineland the Good, — in another year Karlsefni's outpost would be gone, as if what they had done out upon the Headland, under the torn Banners of the Clouds, were too terrible, and any question of who had prevail'd come to matter ever less, as Days went on, whilst the residue of Dishonor before the Gods and Heroes would never be scour'd away." (634)

This episode, it should be noted, occupies a small place in the *Saga of Eric the Red*, and Karlsefni's settlement, while lasting longer than those previous, was not the first outpost from Greenland. Furthermore, the appearance of the mysterious woman is a minor occurrence in the context of the original story, but here it is raised to a position of major significance. The tale becomes, then, articulated in this voice that is at once commanding, being but another incarnation of the fluid main narrator, but also being, momentarily but definitively (because of the quotation marks), that of the singular and usually silent Stig, a parable of mystery and horror, of failed first contact, which marks the American colonial experience as, from the outset, subject to violence and loss.

As Stig describes it in his peroration, before the return of his normal comical relations with Mrs. Eggslap:

“These are Tales of the Westward Escapes, of Helgi and Finnbogi, and Thorstein the Swarthy, and Biarni Heriulfsson. Rogues and Projectors and Fugitives, they went without pretext, no Christ, no Grail, no expectation beyond each Day’s Turnings, to be haunted by Ghosts more material, less merciful, than any they’d left at their backs.”

Momentarily, then, Stig becomes a kind of disembodied voice of the conscience of *Mason & Dixon*, a novel where the colonial legacy, much like the holocaust and nuclear legacy in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, hovers like a dark cloud, largely imperceptible to the characters, but casting a perpetual gloom over the reader’s experience. Contact, in this account, becomes fraught with the inherent agonies of the tribal reflex: the flight into the new world, with or without Christ, was (and remains), as we now know, a headlong plummet into ever-new realms of the human capacity for democratised inhumanity and massive failures of the spirit. In this moment, the native other cannot be seen as the wide-eyed doppelganger they in fact are, but must be reduced to the mere sum of their imaginary physical parts, from the imminence of their destruction issuing the material ghosts, haunting the colonial project, of which Stig speaks.

## Wade

A similar moral theme is contained in the last of these inner stories that I want to mention in this chapter. Another counter-example, though, this is, if we retain the inappropriate conventions of Genette’s categories, in fact of the same metadiegetic status as Cherrycoke’s narrative, being Wade LeSpark’s account of meeting Mason and Dixon. Again, I will describe the intricate narratological workings of this passage before discussing its substance. At the opening of chapter forty-one, in the frame context, Mr. LeSpark acknowledges that he “[r]an into them once at a Ridotto, actually” (410). From this issues a typical conversation in the frame, followed by a line break and a return to the narrator’s voice, which articulates the adventures of the young Mr. LeSpark



for just over a page. We know that this is a representation of a story actually told by Mr. LeSpark for his family because it is followed by an excerpt that Cherrycoke privately “journalizes...to himself, later” (412), in which he explicitly responds to “his [LeSpark’s] rendering.” Another line break and the narrative returns to Mason and Dixon, describing their arrival and adventures at Lepton Castle, which continues until the end of the chapter. The following chapter again begins with a frame passage, in which the rights and wrongs of gambling are discussed, which is appropriate to the predominating events (gaming) at Lepton Castle. A return to the main story sees Mason and Dixon lamenting their losses at gaming, concluding that Lord Lepton has cheated them, and resolving to purloin a large iron tub by way of restitution. As they eventually make their way out of the Castle they observe a mounted rifle with an inverted star on its cheek piece, reminding them of the Cape and Lancaster Town. There is then a line break to the frame context, which, after six lines, with no typographical shift, returns to the main narration. The diegetic movements here, beginning in the main story, are rendered thus:

...the Lads now encounter a Dutch Rifle with a Five-pointed Star upon its Cheek-Piece, inverted, in Silver highly polish’d, shining thro’ the Grain upon the Wrist and Comb that billows there in stormy Intricacy, set casually above some subsidiary Hearth in a lightly-frequented Room. — A Polaris of Evil...

“As it happen’d,” relates Mr. LeSpark, “I was reclining right there, upon a Couch, seeking a moment’s Ease from the remorseless Frolick, — ”

“Alone, of course,” his Wife twinkling dangerously.

“As Night after dismal night, my green Daffodil, thro’ the bleakness of that pre-marital Vacuum, Claims of the Trade preempting all, — not least the Society of your estimable Sex.” In which pitiable state, he dozes off and awakens into the Surveyor’s Bickering as to the Rifle’s Provenance, — Mason insisting ‘tis a Cape Rifle, Dixon an American one.

“’Tis no Elephant Gun, — haven’t we seen enough of these here by now, Dear knows? Barrel’s shorter, Stock’s another Wood altogether.”

“Your Faith being famous, of course, for its close Appreciation of Weaponry.”

“Ev’ry Farmer here has a Rifle by him, ‘tis a primary Tool, much as an Ax or a Plow...? tha can’t have feail’d to noatice...?”

“Surrounded upon all sides, Night and Day, by the American Mob, ev’ry blessed one of them packing Firrearrms, — why, why yes, I may’ve made some note of that, — ”

Wade LeSpark slowly arises, to peer at them over the back of the Couch, — “Good evening, Gentlemen. I was just lying here, having a Gaze at this m’self.

Handsome Unit, 's it not? You can usually tell where one was made, from its Patch-Box," reaching for the Rifle, turning the right side of the Butt toward the Lanthorn, " — the Finials being each peculiar to its Gunsmith, a kind of personal signature...look ye, here it is again, your inverted Star, work'd into the Piercings, as a Cryptogram...withal, this Brass is unusual, — pale, as you'd say, — high Zinc content, despite the British embargo, and sand-cast rather than cut from sheet....

"Lord Lepton hath an Eye, — Damme." He cannot release his Grasp upon the thing. (428)

At this point, then, Mr. LeSpark has actually become a character in the story of Mason and Dixon, being described by the narrator, but we must assume here that this is a translation of LeSpark's story, not Cherrycoke's. This continues for two and a half pages, before the protagonists leave the resting arms dealer and continue on their way.

Clearly we have another example of radical narrating fluidity in terms of both level and voice, and in that context I would like to discuss the first narrative of the young Mr. LeSpark in relation to Cherrycoke's journalising response. The relationship between LeSpark and Cherrycoke (although the former, as the unchallenged patriarch of the family, is largely silent throughout) is the critical one of the frame context. This is a relationship based on family obligation between two men whose personal interests could not be more antithetical: the gentlemanly and wealthy trader in weaponry, as opposed to the dishevelled, morally troubled, deep-thinking and pauperish reverend. There abides, though, between the two a suspicious mutual respect, although the balance of power is clearly demarcated. We know, Cherrycoke knows, and LeSpark knows (and they know that each other knows), for example, that the latter is

in his home yet Sultan<sup>33</sup> enough to convey to the Rev<sup>d</sup>, tho' without ever so stipulating, that, for as long as he can keep the children amus'd, he may remain, — too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage at the wrong moment, however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him.... (6)

This relationship of power and dependency is referenced throughout the novel, and the understated antagonism between the two is palpable, for

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<sup>33</sup> The *Arabian Nights* reference is clear enough not to be elaborated on.

example in this exchange, after Cherrycoke mentions Maskelyne's "publishing his Almanack and doing his bit for global trade." Wade responds:

"Something wrong with that, Wicks? Inquires Mr. LeSpark.  
 "Only in so far as it is global, and not Celestial," replies the Rev<sup>d</sup>, with a holy Smirk master'd in his first week of Curacy.  
 The Merchant of Purposeful Explosion throws an arm across his Brow.  
 "Your Halo blinds me, Sir. Aye, most Italian, — Joy of it, I'm sure." (105)

A less light-hearted moment comes later, in an exchange of manifest feeling:

"At the Time of Bushy Run," confides Ives LeSpark, " — and I have seen the very Document, — General Bouquet and General Gage both sign'd off on expenditures to replace Hospital Blankets us'd 'to convey the Small-pox to the Indians,' as they perhaps too clearly stipulated. To my knowledge," marvels Ives, "this had never been attempted, on the part of any modern Army, till then."

"Yes, Wicks?" Mr. LeSpark beaming at the Rev<sup>d</sup>, "You wish'd to add something? You may ever speak freely here, — killing Indians having long ago ceas'd to figure as a sensitive Topick in *this* House."

"Since you put it that way," the Rev<sup>d</sup>, in will'd Cheeriness, "firstly, — ev'ryone knew about the British infection of the Indians, and no one spoke out. The Paxton Boys were but implementing this same Wicked Policy of extermination, using Rifles instead, — altho', — Secondly, unlike our own more virtuous Day, no one back then, was free from Sin. Quakers, as handsomely as Traders of less pacific Faiths, profited from the sale of Weapons to the Indians, including counterfeit Brown Besses that blew up in the faces of their Purchasers, as often as fell'd any White Settlers. Thirdly, —

"How many more are there likely to be?" inquires his Brother-in-Law.  
 "Apparently I must reconsider my offer." (307)

And during the passage we are considering here, in a frame conversation before returning to Mason and Dixon lamenting their losses at gaming, Cherrycoke is discussing gambling, which he compares (in its wagering on the will of God) to more mundane activities, such as business. Pretending interest, Wade invites Cherrycoke to elaborate: "Pray you, setting aside whose Hearth you are ever welcome at, tell me all" (422). Finally, the presence of Wade throughout is reflected by an early passage, where the narrator introduces Ethelmer's reflections on what he knows of his uncle, which provides an important backdrop for my discussion here:

Mr. LeSpark made his Fortune years before the War, selling weapons to French and British, Settlers and Indians alike, — Knives, Tomahawks, Rifles,

Hand-Cannons in the old Dutch Style, Grenades, small Bombs. "Trouble yourself not," he lik'd to assure his Customers, "over Diameter." If there are Account-books in which Casualties are the Units of Exchange, then, so it seems to Ethelmer, his Uncle is deeply in Arrears. Ethelmer has heard tales of past crimes, but can hardly assault his Host with accusations. Ev'ryone "knows," — that is, considering Uncle Wade as some collection of family stories, ev'ryone remembers. Some Adventures have converg'd into a *Saga* that is difficult to reconcile with the living Uncle.... (31)<sup>34</sup>

The reading we bring to the version of LeSpark's story that the novel presents is inflected deeply, then, by Cherrycoke's private response. LeSpark reminisces about his younger days, travelling into the wilderness, purchasing iron for his business, which leads him inevitably to Lord Lepton's Iron-Plantation. I will quote Cherrycoke's response in full:

"What is not visible in his rendering," journalizes the Rev<sup>d</sup> to himself, later, "is the Negro Slavery, that goes on making such no doubt exquisite moments possible, — the inhuman ill-usage, the careless abundance of pain inflicted, the unpric'd Coercion necessary to yearly Profits beyond the projectings even of proud Satan. In the shadows where the Forge's glow does not reach, or out uncomforted beneath the vaporous daylight of Chesapeake, bent to the day's loads of Fuel from the vanishing Hardwood Groves nearby, or breathing in the mephitic Vapors of the bloomeries, — wordlessly and, as some may believe, patiently, they bide everywhere, these undeclared secular terms in the Equations of Proprietary Happiness." (412)

The interest in this is that it is a response to the original story of Mr. LeSpark, a story that is inaccessible to us as we read instead the narrator's rephrasing of it. The narration here adopts the past tense, emphasising the narrated, story-time quality, which underscores the passage with the suspicion of narrating power evident in this novel's implicit attitude to the preterite mode. The idealism of the original is, furthermore, built into the tone and content that we read, meaning we get a sense of LeSpark's intent, but the narrator's conscience, in moral parallel with Cherrycoke's, gives to his rendering an irony bordering on sarcasm that performs, in this context, the moral counterpoint that Cherrycoke, in his, is unable to convey — except silently. LeSpark's authority (both narrating and social), his moral blindness and

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<sup>34</sup> Ethelmer, another moral focus in the novel, has his own encounters with the power represented by Wade, for example, pp 76, 409.

complicity in violence and destruction, are facetiously attacked by this translating voice that uses the original intent of LeSpark's story against itself to give a modern (that is, self-conscious) literary voice to the opprobrium that Cherrycoke may not voice. Thus:

In those days, out past the reach of civic Lanthorns, as of Nail-hung Lamps in Sheds, and Tallow Dips, and the last feeble Rush-Light, — beyond, in the Forest, where the supernatural was less a matter of Publick-Room trickery or Amusement, Mr. LeSpark, as he tells it, was us'd to visit with potential customers, as well as tour his sources of supply, — Gunsmithies, Forges, Bloomeries, and Barrel Mills, — passing as in a glide, thro' the Country, safe inside a belief as unquestioning as in any form of Pietism you could find out there that he, yes little JWL, goeth likewise under the protection of a superior Power, — not, in this case, God, but rather, Business. What turn of earthly history, however perverse, would dare interfere with the workings of the Invisible Hand? (411)

The reference to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, subsequent, that is, to LeSpark's meeting with Mason and Dixon, ironically comments on the mercantile and moral optimism of this pioneer of American capitalism. The narrator, addressing the themes we saw approached by Stig, goes on to explain, in a disingenuously light-hearted tone, LeSpark's pleasure, which we modern readers, informed by the realities of global consumerism, encounter with a horrified shudder, at finding that

[e]ven the savages were its [the invisible hand's] creatures, — a merchant's Pipe-Reverie, and, if consider'd as a class of Purchasers-at-retail, — well, — more admirable even than Dutch housewives, in the single-minded joy with which they brows'd and chose....

The sentimental idealism, guaranteed from encounters with reality, of LeSpark's adventures is further emphasised by the contrast between Cherrycoke's reference to the "mephitic Vapors of the bloomeries" and LeSpark's experience, where "[a]ll noxious smokes and gases were being vented someplace distant, invisible." The unconscious duplicity and irrationality of the West's drive to exploit yet sentimentalise both nature and the other is characterised in LeSpark's pathetic and needy romanticism, which abides only by way of a profound lack of self-awareness:

This, LeSpark must remind himself, each time he rounded one particular unfolding of the Trail, — Hazel branches parting, river noise suddenly in the air, Dogs on route and at the Gallop, — this was how the world might be. To see with nothing but this Simplicity, to take only these unpolluted Breaths, to leave the shop after the last of the light, with a face as willingly free of Affliction as that presented at Dawn, — 'twas a moment, hard come by out here, of viewing things whole, and he grew with each Visit more and more to depend upon it.

The final moment of this interlude identifies LeSpark with the positivist voice of modernity and science, divorcing themselves, through a transcendent aesthetic, which recalls Weissmann's romanticism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, from the real-world intentions and consequences of their endeavours:

It is something he cannot explain to many people, — he knows that few distinguish between the Metal itself, and the Forms it happens to end up in, the uses it is widely known for being put to, against living Bodies, — cutting, chaining, penetrating sort of Activities, — a considerable Sector of the iron market, indeed, directed to offenses against Human, and of course Animal, flesh.... "All too true," he can imagine himself saying, "yet, once you have felt the invisible Grasp of the Magnetic, or gazed, unto transport, as the Gangue falls away before the veined and billowing molten light, oh the blinding purity —"

"Oh, Mr. LeSpark," being the likely reply. (412)

The concluding image here, identifying LeSpark's imagined unburdening of himself as, like Stig's, with a woman who could not care less, speaks volumes. It recalls again Weissman's ranting to Gottfried, his sexual slave;<sup>35</sup> it calls into doubt LeSpark's protestations to his wife of "the bleakness of that pre-marital Vacuum" (428), alerting us to his casual hypocrisy; the anachronistic, duplicitous cliché of the woman's utterance emphasises this man's need to find comfort and affirmation in the pre-scripted role she plays out for him, directed by the demands of social inequality; and, related to this, his self-deluding pleasure in finding his every desire fulfilled places him squarely in the role of the economically powerful who, despite all, remain most blind to the human realities they unknowingly dictate.

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<sup>35</sup> Pynchon, *GR* 721-4.

The serious tone of my exegesis here should not deflect from the humour of this passage, which is achieved by the supercilious tone the narrator adopts in simulating a self-conscious version of LeSpark's sentimental nostalgia. The seriousness is contributed by Cherrycoke's passage, which follows LeSpark's and speaks back to it, redirecting the humour from the light and lightweight to the dark and disturbing. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that throughout *Mason & Dixon*, as elsewhere in Pynchon's fiction, literary wit is never overly subordinate to profundity of theme. Rather, the two exist in dialogue, in the manner of satire, with the significance of the message speaking through the entertainment and artistry of the medium. Pynchon's novels almost never speak in polemics, though they may employ figures such as Cherrycoke to do so for them (and these, also, are never free from a certain ironic authorial and readerly perspective). As we have seen in this passage, the narrating freedoms that are achieved in this novel allow for a mode of signification, through styles, voices and tones, that brings to the surface of the text a radical and revealing dialogue between provisional subjective stances, placing the reader in a consciously projective role that requires their imaginative linguistic fulfillment of the potentials for meaningfulness that abide within the ensuing dramas of ambiguously represented speech.

### ***The Mason & Dixon Show***

Out of respect for the predominantly humorous timbre of *Mason & Dixon's* narration, and after the considerable space I have given to investigating its paradoxically charged management of diegetic levels and voices, I would like now to conclude this chapter with an examination of one instance (out of potentially many others) where we can appreciate some of the ways in which the resulting narrating freedom signifies an appropriate reading sensibility. Eschewing, then, my concentration on the relationships between diegetic levels, I will discuss here what is simply part of the main narrative of Mason and Dixon's story, ostensibly Cherrycoke's metadiegetic narrative. This is in

chapter seventy-three, which enjoys nonetheless a certain meta-representational privilege, being the final chapter of the large middle section of the novel, “America.” Here we find the screen-inspired bias of the novel being explicitly evoked, along with a host of other cultural influences coming into play, concluding the “America” section with a whimsical reverie on some of the novel’s abiding themes and ideas and, significantly for my purposes, providing an exemplary instance of its manifold means of signification with a narrator who is subjectively endless and able, thereby, to adopt any representational voice.

This chapter appears after Mason and Dixon have completed their time in America and have already boarded the Falmouth Packet back to England. It opens with this subjective postulate:

As all History must converge to Opera in the Italian Style, however, their Tale as Commemorated might have to proceed a bit more hopefully. Suppose that Mason and Dixon and their Line cross Ohio after all, and continue West by the customary ten-minute increments,— .... (706)

The second part of this sentence then gives us a hint as to the form this imagined romantic proceeding might take: “each installment of the Story finding the Party advanc’d into yet another set of lives, another Difficulty to be resolv’d before it can move on again.” The next sentence leaves this in no doubt:

Behind, in pursuit, his arrangements undone, pride wounded, comes Sir William Johnson, play’d as a Lunatick Irishman, riding with a cadre of close Indian Friends,— somehow, as if enacting a discarded draft of Zeno’s Paradox, never quite successful in attacking even the rearmost of the Party’s stragglers, who remain ever just out of range. Yet at any time, we are led to believe, the Pursuers *may* catch up, and compel the Surveyors to return behind the Warrior Path.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Sir William Johnson, both historically and in the novel, is a mediator between the party and various Indian nations concerned at the line’s encroachment deeper into the American interior. He is treated with reasonable dignity in his one appearance in the novel, when Fields and Zhang stay at his Castle, portrayed as “the Irish Baronet, wearing Skins, and a Raccoon Hat, out among his People, the Serfs of Johnson Castle, moving easily among the groups, switching among the English, Mohawk, Seneca, and Onondaga Languages as needed” (532), with, following this, references to his (historical) “Masonick” connections.



What we have, then, is a television sitcom made from the ongoing adventures of Mason and Dixon's "Westering," the two, we learn, having early given up on autumn returns east, meaning "the ties back in to Philadelphia and Chesapeake will come to mean that much less, as the Pair, detach'd at last, begin consciously to move west" (706-7). This is typical of what I have been arguing about the novel's narration: the voice remains self-identical here, as throughout, but speaks in a voice that, *in itself*, cumulatively, informs us of how to read the passage: the original reference to "installment[s] of the Story," and the conceit of each involving "another Difficulty to be resolv'd," alerts us to this typical situation for a weekly television serial; that William Johnson is "play'd" confirms that this moment of the novel is a performance; the straight-faced "we are led to believe, the Pursuers *may* catch up" captures the essence of the *situation* that allows such a television show to justify itself week after week; yet the "discarded draft of Zeno's Paradox" is typical of the narrator's wit throughout, reasserting both his constant presence in the novel as well as the *reality* of all it contains; and the line about "the ties back in to Philadelphia and Chesapeake" illustrates this narrator's ability to continue narrating in his accustomed style, on established topics, even in the midst of this bizarre representational moment.

Throughout the early parts of the chapter this conceit of the sitcom abides, with the plots of certain episodes recounted and the trajectory of the series described, but at the same time the imaginative scope of the novel takes things beyond the normal bounds of television. Thus we are told that "soon the Axmen are down to Stig alone, who when ask'd to, becomes a one-man assault force on behalf of the Astronomers. The Musick, from some source invisible, is resolutely merry, no matter what it may be accompanying" (706). Yet the boundlessness of the novel's capacity for play and representation means that it goes further with this comedic situation than we might consider possible for an actual television show, as seen when we follow the Astronomers

[i]nto the Illinois, where they find renegade French living out a fantasy of the Bourbon Court, teaching the Indians Dress-making, Millinery, Wine-Growing, *Haute Cuisine*, orchestral Musick, Wig-Dressing, and such other Arts of answering Desire as may sustain this Folly. (707)

Mason and Dixon's characters retain their essential qualities, though, as we learn next that:

[t]hey stay at villages of teepees where Mason as usual behaves offensively enough to require their immediate departure, at a quite inconvenient time, too, for Dixon and his Maiden of the day, who've both been looking forward to a few private moments.

And in a classic sitcom move, "[t]hey acquire a Sidekick; a French-Shawanese half-breed Renegado nam'd Vongolli, whose only loyalty is to Mason and Dixon."

At the same time, however, the chapter does not descend into total farce, and the novel does not forget itself, meaning that amidst the above we are also privy to such as thoughts as this:

Were they to be taken together, themselves light and dark Sides of a single Planet, with America the Sun, an Observation Point on high may be chosen, from which they may be seen to pass across a Face serene and benevolent at that Distance, tho' from the Distance of the Planet, often, Winter as Summer, harsh and inimical.

This bizarre metaphor of course aligns Mason and Dixon with Venus, they transiting the Earth as the planet the sun. The substance of the image is not as important, though, as its appearance in this context, where the manifold significations of the novel continue to abide within the unfolding image of the Mason and Dixon television series. In many respects we have seen this before, in the way the novel chooses to narrate the filmic, an impossible translation that means, for example, providing information by way of narrative so that it may be apprehended by the reader, in the manner of dreams, as the already given, the already known. We can see this in operation here when,

[d]escending great bluffs, they cross the Mississippi, the prehistoric Mounds above having guided them exactly here, by an Influence neither can characterize more than vaguely, but whose accuracy is confirm'd by their Star observations, as nicely as the Micrometer and Nonius will permit.

All the quotations I have given above come from the first two pages of this chapter, indicating briefly the extent of signifying shifts the narrator is able to achieve with the malleability of his voice.

The Mason and Dixon television series threatens to “jump the shark,”<sup>37</sup> however, when the pair discover the new planet (later Uranus) some fifteen years earlier than Herschel and debate whether or not to return back east to certain fame, fortune and the Copley Medal. This is more Mason’s preference than Dixon’s, who is found “trying to get into the spirit of things” (709). The former’s growing monomania at the idea, though, is represented by the echo of George III in his “whatwhat?” (709), and they eventually decide to sacrifice the romance of their endless “Westering” for the sake of “the Career-maker each has dreamt of, at differing moments and degrees of Faith” (708).

At this point, however, the characters of the sitcom transform into “real life,” and this televisual conceit merges into the imaginative freedom of the novel at large. Meeting again the people whose lives they have irreversibly affected, the pair is not well received, indicating to all the foolishness of their self-aggrandising mission, which leads to the most entertaining passage in the chapter:

A recently wed couple assault them, screaming, “Yes you came the proper pair of bloody little Cupids, didn’t you, then just went polka-dancing away, leaving *us* to sort out *his* mother, the recruiting Sergeant, the Sheriff, the other Girl, — ”

“ — whilst ev’ry low-life you gentlemen caus’d to be suck’d into town in your Wake is ogling the Queen of Sheba, here, who never could keep her eyes to herself, and say what you will, Wife, my dear Mother has ever shewn the born grace and sense of the true lady.”

“D’you hear that then, you miserable cow? once again as I’ve ever been telling all you Scum, none of you’s good enough for my Boy Adolphus, ’specially not you, fifteen stone of unredeem’d Slut, my gracious just look at you, — ”

“Bitch!” the wife two-handedly swinging at her mother-in-law’s Head a great Skillet, which none of the men present are hasty in rushing to deflect, — the older woman dodges the blow, and from somewhere produces a Dirk. In a moment, someone will have to load and prime a Pistol. All this having

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<sup>37</sup> According to the website, [jumptheshark.com](http://jumptheshark.com), this is “[a] defining moment when you know that your favorite television program has reached its peak. That instant that you know from now on...it’s all downhill. Some call it the climax. We call it “Jumping the Shark.””

resulted from the award-winning “Love Laughs at a Line” episode, which seem’d but light-hearted Frolick that first time through. (710-1)

When they finally arrive at the post marked west, to be met by “[a] Joint Delegation from the American and Royal Societies, alerted by Jesuit Telegraph” (711), the passage, then, referring back to one of the novel’s more bizarre postulates, we are pleased to find that Mason and Dixon manage, in fact, to avoid jumping the shark and, possibly, do the right thing. Seeming to forget entirely about their astronomical discovery (though possibly they have already transmitted the appropriate information via Jesuit telegraph), they instead, as Dixon puts it: “Devise a way to inscribe a Visto upon the Atlantick Sea” (412). With this idea we entirely leave behind the sitcom and enter into a newly imagined “true” history for the protagonists, one that in its unlikely satisfaction of our ideal hopes, does indeed evoke the romance of “Opera in the Italian Style.” The scheme for the line projected across the ocean comes to fruition,

with the Solution to the Question of the Longitude thrown in as a sort of Bonus, — as, exactly at ev’ry Degree, might the Sea-Line, as upon a Fiduciary Scale for Navigators, be prominently mark’d, by a taller Beacon, or a differently color’d Lamp. In time, most Ships preferring to sail within sight of these Beacons, the Line shall have widen’d to a Sea-Road of a thousand Leagues, as up and down its Longitude blossom Wharves, Chandleries, Inns, Tobacco-shops, Greengrocers’ Stalls, Printers of News, Dens of Vice, Chapels for Repentance, Shops full of Souvenirs and Sweets, — all a Sailor could wish, — indeed, many such will decide to settle here, “Along the Beacons,” for good, as a way of coming to rest whilst remaining out at Sea.

Unfortunately, of course,

...word will reach the Land-Speculation Industry, and its Bureaus seek Purchase, like some horrible Seaweed, the length of the Beacon Line. Some are estopp’d legally, some are fended directly into the Sea, yet Time being ever upon their Side, they persist, and one Day, in sinister yet pleasing Coral-dy’d cubickal Efflorescence, appears “St. Brendan’s Isle,” a combination Pleasure-Grounds and Pensioners’ Home, with ev’rything an Itinerant come to Rest might ask, Taverns, Music-Halls, Gaming-Rooms, and a Population ever changing of Practitioners of Comfort, to Soul as to Body, uncritical youngsters from far-off lands where death might almost abide, so ubiquitous is it there, so easily do they tolerate it here. (712-3)

Nonetheless, despite all, in this subjunctive world our heroes for once come out on top. The chapter, and the section, ends:

‘Tis here Mason and Dixon will retire, being after all Plank-Holders of the very Scheme, having written a number of foresighted Stipulations into their Contract with the Line’s Proprietor, the transnoctially charter’d “Atlantick Company.” Betwixt themselves, neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either Side of the Ocean. They are content to reside like Ferry-men or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition. (713)

This diversion in chapter seventy-three need not be over-emphasised; it is merely one of the many imaginative excursions that the narrative takes throughout the novel. My point in discussing it here is less to do with its romanticising of the story than to illustrate some of the ways in which the novel’s singular narrator is able, through the radical fluidity he establishes in the novel, to speak an ever-fluid succession of subjective poses without the need for explicit stage-management: we become, in other words, alert as readers to cues in the narrative voice that tell us when, for example, we may be watching a television show; when the narrative has moved beyond that to dwell on deeper issues thus arising; when the Mason and Dixon we know are discussing seriously the rights and wrongs of claiming a prize that in reality they would never come near; when the bit-characters in a sitcom have come to life and are living the reality thus thrust upon them; and when we are being indulged by a romantic idyll that is intended to be read as just that. By following the voice through these manifestations we are treated to an imaginative and engaging journey guided by a narrator who is never bound by expectations governing his role, position, point of view or identity, all of which are equally fluid within the ubiquity of his unique yet endlessly multifaceted voice.

## Section Three

### *Chapter Four: Sentiment Narrated*

“...surely our Sentiments,—how we dream’d of, and were mistaken in, each other,—count for at least as much as our poor cold Chronologies.”

Rev<sup>d</sup> Wicks Cherrycoke

Surely there must be some license under God for caring mediocrity.

George Steiner

In this chapter I will return to the issue of sentiment—in respect to *Mason & Dixon* and in light of my preceding discussion of this novel’s narrative form. The sentimental content of *Mason & Dixon* is privileged in that it characterises the content of the final section of the novel, “Last Transit,” and so enjoys the signifying status unavoidably involved in a novel’s denouement. My intention here is to explore the dynamic between the reality status of the novel’s characters and its narrative’s foregrounding of representation that I have articulated in the previous section. I will construct this argument around the chapters of the “Last Transit” section, moving between these and the rest of the novel, using chapter three as an entry point. Firstly, I will deal with chapters seventy-four and seventy-six, which mostly involve Mason, the primary figure of the novel. Next I will look at chapters seventy-five and seventy-seven, which concentrate on the relationship between Mason and Dixon. Finally, I will explore chapter seventy-eight, the last of the novel,

where the sentiment revolves around, firstly, Dixon's death, then Mason's, and, more generally, the novel's own ending and ultimate sentimental status as these are moderated through its representational tactics.

What I have termed the "reality status" of the novel's characters derives from their consistency of voice when found in quotation marks throughout the novel.<sup>1</sup> This is in distinct and significant contrast to the narrator, whose voice, as we have seen, is malleable and fluid (both in respect to its place and its identity), representing itself finally *as* representation rather than as a verbally manifest instance of a singular identity. At the same time, however, the narrator is unabashed at times about representing his voice as one of deep seriousness, reflecting sympathetically on, or representing the emotional anxieties of, his characters; these instances, arising at critical moments throughout the novel, will be disproportionately represented in this chapter, where I will find them informing the sentimental scenes under consideration. Arising out of a narrating stance of humanist seriousness (a non-ironic stance, but a stance nonetheless), the sentiment of the novel rests on readers' engagement with the manner or *look* of the narrator's representations of his own voice and the scenes he narrates: despite the representational games of the novel, its sentimental content depends on this serious simulation of bold-faced earnestness, which, as with all the narrator's attitudes, is nonetheless bound up inextricably in the self-conscious constructedness of all he narrates. The authenticity here in that sense depends on the narrator's treating with equal respect all the figures of his narration, meaning that the sentiment of the novel, despite issuing from the perceived reality-status of the characters, does not manifest this reality as one external to the reader's imaginative work: issuing out of representation, these characters are only perceived as real in terms of the reader's conscious engagement with representation. The latter remains the privileged mode, meaning the

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously this is not relevant in respect to those few instances I have already discussed where a quoted voice becomes infected by the narrator's voice, such as in the case of Stig.

sentimental issues not from an apprehended autonomous reality, but only within the reader's autonomy of active interpretation.

Characters in the novel – be they dogs, ducks, astronomers or ghosts – constitute its sentimental focus, and they arise from, are expressed through, and find themselves in, pure representation. Pictorially bereft, this is of course the case for all characters in all literary narrative: ultimately their *voices* are the representational nodes by which characters' realities are inferred. If sentimental disgrace attends the apprehension of autonomous reality inhering in the inanimate, this disgrace is mitigated when the sentimental idealisation involves a knowing and active construction of that reality within language and the imagination: ultimately, because *Mason & Dixon's* language, and its characters' language, is, in its every phrase, merely the image of language, because meaningfulness must come to it from the reader, its sentimental reality, while seeming to rise out of representation, remains also, necessarily, embedded within it. As I have suggested, the sentimental experience here issues from the liminal surfaces between representation and reality, where the apprehension of one involves an immersion in the other. The sentimental that avoids disgrace must know itself as hopelessly and hopefully grasping; grasping in solitude within the realms of the communal imagination: grasping at the self, the other, at death, and at reality within representation: language.

### **The Bio-Pic**

In terms of the film paradigm that this thesis continues to refer to, while the narrating voice of *Mason & Dixon* enjoys the dual function of representing the unchanging ubiquity of the screen as well as the *look* of what appears on that screen, the characters' voices, which are clearly distinct from that of the narrator (in both the obvious sense and in the sense of being stable and singular), speak out from the screen, asserting, in our imagination, both their autonomy and their discreet identities. This is in perpetual tension with the fact that these voices are nonetheless in dialogue with the manners in which the characters and their worlds are being constructed by the overtly



representational cues of the narrating voice, meaning that our experience of these characters' realities is also being constantly mediated by this pervasive foregrounding of form. Their humanist presence, then, is negotiated amidst the seeming denial of its possibility, and our apparent sentimental experience of this presence in fact falls along the axes of this negotiation.

It should further be noted the extent to which the narrative trajectory of *Mason & Dixon* emulates that of biographical film, a genre particularly susceptible to sentimentalism given its focus on individual characters whose lives are deemed already sufficiently distinguished to be recreated for mass consumption. Recent examples of the genre include: *Pollock* (2000), which consists mostly of the word "genius" being breathlessly bandied about, and where alcoholism is treated as an inconvenient impediment to the fulfilment of that very (necessarily humanist) genius; *Finding Neverland* (2004), where the life and death of Sylvia Llewelyn Davies (Kate Winslett) provide the sentimental cornerstones for this story of J. M. Barrie (Johnny Depp) and his relationship with Davies and her children, particularly her son, Peter (Freddie Highmore); and *De-Lovely* (2004), the story of Cole Porter (Kevin Kline), which revolves around his relationship with, and the death of, his wife, Linda Porter (Ashley Judd).<sup>2</sup> These films are able to take advantage of the way in which forward progress of narrative in film, because of the very nature of the form, is less dependent on a plot-driven impetus than is the equivalent progress in the novel. This is because of the essential difference between an unfolding that occurs as a mechanical necessity, independent of the audience's levels of engagement, and an unfolding that depends on readers' work, which can only be motivated by a certain fascination. In the cinema or on television the narrative unfolds "before our very eyes," while on the page it can only follow from the eyes' will to proceed. Individual scenes, in this context, are called

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<sup>2</sup> *De-Lovely* is, like *Mason & Dixon*, told through a narrated flashback, with the ageing Porter watching the "stage-show" (which we see as film) of his life and commenting on events. However, here the technique does not bring into question or interrogate the ontological status of the narrative and is little more than a gimmick that contributes a sense of Porter's nostalgia to the sentimental content.

upon to function as sentimental tableaux as much as to provide impetus for the narrative.

Thus, the plots of the films mentioned above are mostly episodic, noting important moments in the two-hour histories they create of their subjects' lives; there is little in the way of suspense or anticipation, but rather these films capture their audience's attention through the appeal of their characters' historical and moral significance. This significance is confirmed in the version of their biography that is presented: their talents are displayed through the (unacknowledged) anachronistic lenses of hindsight, and their personal flaws are subordinate to a general affirmation of their lovability and (humanist) virtue. These films can be regarded as sentimental in their general treatment of character and history, but they derive their greatest sentimental effect through their attitude to death, either the death of the protagonist or the death of their (equally virtuous) partner. Death, as in the eighteenth-century novel and in the films I discussed in chapter one, somehow acts to sanction virtue and moral purity and is intimately bound up in the historical sentimental, its apprehension seeming to offer the possibility of inter-subjective identification. It is also redemptive and transcendent: Pollock's death is presented as saving him from a pitiful fall into artistic impotence; Davies' death brings about a rapprochement between her disapproving mother and Barrie; and Linda Porter's death confirms her devotion to Cole, and his to her. These three films, however, rehearse what I found in my earlier chapter, where, through Jonathan Lamb's insights, I suggested that the extradiegetic viewers find, not affirmation, but rather disgrace in their encountering this greater, autonomous reality (on screen), which, artistically vacuous, shores up the sense of a threatening, denuding, inanimate version of the real.

Inspired on a formal level by this type of film, *Mason & Dixon*, while celebrating preterite lives that are disgraced within modern history, is likewise episodic, with virtually no plot momentum derived from the traditional novelistic tools of mystery, suspense and anticipation. The

characters of the protagonists, also, are revealed with an immediacy brought about by their actions in the particular episodes, rather than by their being contextualised and introduced by the narrator. The first section of the novel, "Latitudes and Departures," formulates their friendship in terms of the crisis they face together when their ship is attacked. It then reveals their characters in respect to each other through the entertaining chapters at the Cape, further explores this territory when they are parted (Mason remaining at St. Helena and Dixon returning to the Cape), and finally uses their return to England to introduce us to their home lives. Having thus established their characters, the "America" section of the novel is given over mostly to episodes that are entertaining or evocative in their own right, with Mason and Dixon generally acting as bystanders, observers and conduits for the reader's sense of meaningfulness. This section can be roughly divided into a tripartite structure: the early chapters in America are a patchwork of impressions the protagonists get of that continent; in chapter forty-four they begin the west line, which becomes a carnival of intriguing characters, absurd philosophical musings and bizarre events; and Stig's narrative at the beginning of chapter sixty-six marks the beginning of a concentration on moral and existential doubts, most significantly centred around the appearance of the Native Americans who desire an end to the progress of the line. The final section of the novel, "Last Transit," brings the story to a close with a renewed concentration on the relationship between the two men and a sentimental treatment of their separate lives, their reunions, their ageing and finally their deaths.

### **Encountering Fang**

Chapter three of the novel has already provided us with a way into an analysis of its narration. Similarly it will prove a useful starting point for my discussions of Mason and his relationship with Dixon, as I approach these from the perspective of the final section of the novel. On the first page of that final section, regarding Mason's decision to decline to observe the transit of

Venus from the North Cape, we are told Dixon's thoughts on this possible snub: "He knows enough of Mason to recognize by now most of the shapes his Pursuit of the Gentlemanly takes on, as well as the true extent of his progress beyond the socially stumbling Philosopher-Fool he began as" (717). This is as good a general description of Mason as we find in the novel: he is, briefly, socially inept, pretentious, haughty, irascible, and constantly questing for scientific and/or spiritual illumination. He is also naïve, deeply sensitive, grieving for his wife, guilt-ridden, paranoid, desperate for understanding, and capable, when he manages to escape crippling self-consciousness, of intelligence, insight and wit. We can see these characteristics coming into focus as early as chapter three, firstly in the opening conversation where we meet the two protagonists and they meet each other,<sup>3</sup> and then as they embark on a night out together in Portsmouth and the novel begins to announce its modes of signification.

As I have said, the appearance of the Learned English Dog ("Fang") at this point is a key marker in the novel, indicating that we are moving into a magical realm of possibilities beyond the "real." However, at the same time, Fang's appearance is nestled amid a description that seems grounded in realism and a genuine attempt to recreate the place and period (the potato-eating sailors have yet to make their appearance). Furthermore, the accompaniment to Fang's variety hall song seems to come from *that* world: it is not recognised as a soundtrack playing over the scene, but is thought rather to be issuing from the scene itself. In terms of Mason and Dixon's perceptions, then, we find that they have stumbled unawares into this movie version of their lives – as throughout the novel, their reality is, literally, caught up in representation:

As the day darkens, and the first Flames appear, sometimes reflected as well in Panes of Glass, the sounds of the Stables and the Alleys grow louder, and chimney-smoke perambulates into the Christmastide air. The Room puts

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<sup>3</sup> I will examine this conversation when I begin my discussion of the pair's relationship.

on its Evening-Cloak of shifting amber Light, and sinuous Folds of Shadow. Mason and Dixon become aware of a jostling Murmur of Expectancy.

All at once, out of the Murk, a dozen mirror'd Lanthorns have leapt alight together, as into their Glare now strolls a somewhat dishevel'd Norfolk Terrier, with a raffish Gleam in its eye, — whilst from somewhere less illuminate comes a sprightly Overture upon Horn, Clarinet, and Cello, in time to which the Dog steps back and forth in his bright Ambit.

Ask me anything you please,  
The Learned English Dog am I, well-  
Up on ev'rything from Fleas  
Unto the King's Mon-og-am-eye,

Persian Princes, Polish Blintzes,  
Chinamen's Geo-mancy, —  
Jump-ing Beans or Flying Machines,  
Just as it suits your Fan-cy.

I quote enough of the Classickal Stuff  
To set your Ears a-throb,  
Work logarith-mick Versèd Sines  
Withal, within me Nob,  
— Only nothing *Ministerial*, please,  
Or I'm apt to lose m' Job,  
As, the Learned English Dog, to-ni-ight! (18-9)

The appearance of Fang is on one level of course a historical reference to the period of *Gulliver's Travels* and its attendant beliefs in a world of possibilities, but his consciousness also spans the two centuries following. His song, for example, evokes American vaudeville, while he later goes on to discuss Japanese koans and account for his "præternatural" abilities in a clear (though facetious) reference to modern evolutionary theory. This paragraph also implies Cherrycoke's presence and personal circumstances when Fang describes dogs as "tail-wagging Scheherazades [...] nightly delaying the Blades of our Masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity" (22). In a return to an (anachronistic) eighteenth-century consciousness, though, Fang becomes involved in an argument with a "Lunarian"<sup>4</sup> and is challenged to a

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<sup>4</sup> The narrator refers to a "noisy party of Fops, Macaronis, or Lunarians, — it is difficult quite to distinguish which..." (21). Fops and macaronis are more or less synonymous, but the inclusion of Lunarians (those who were devoted to the lunar system for finding longitude at sea) seems like a typically bizarre Pynchonian conceit, possibly a sideswipe at Maskelyne and other Royal Society stalwarts.

duel; he avoids this by adverting to his “late feelings of Aversion to water,” or “Hydrophobia,” which was the contemporary term for rabies<sup>5</sup> (23).

Despite his seemingly trans-historical ontology, this moment of eighteenth-century “verisimilitude” marks how Fang also enjoys a reality status in the “here and now” mundane reality of the novel. We can see further evidence of this as he leads Mason and Dixon “down the street, pausing now and then for nasal enquiries” until finding a place to piss (20). He also becomes ridiculously “human” in this indignant reaction to Dixon’s suggestion that he has owners: “The Dog has begun to pace back and forth. ‘I am a British Dog, Sir. No one owns me’” (23), a sentiment he returns to with comic seriousness:

“You are the owners of this Marvel?” inquires Mason.  
 “We prefer ‘Exhibitors,’” says Mr. Jellow.  
 “Damme, they’d better,” grumphs the Dog, as if to himself. (23-4)

This sense of a subjective, “human” reality to his character is reaffirmed when we are privy to a narrated monologue of his reactions to encountering a cock fight in action:

The Learned D., drawn by the smell of Blood in the Cock-Pit, tries to act nonchalant, but what can they expect of him? How is he supposed to ignore this pure Edge of blood-love? Oh yawn yes of course, seen it all before, birds slashing one another to death, sixteen go in, one comes out alive, indeed mm-hmm, and a jolly time betwixt, whilst the Substance we are not supposed to acknowledge drips and flies ev’rywhere.... (24)

This references, also, the way the modern domestication of dogs involves an ongoing battle with nature, training the animals to repress such instincts as their attraction to blood. Indeed, we feel a certain sympathy for Fang, as we might for an adolescent lad being chaperoned by his parents in a red-light district, when his matronly protector cajoles him away from this temptation to sin: ““There, Learned,’ calls Mrs. Jellow brusquely, ‘we must leave the birds to

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* entry for the term notes: “Among those dismal symptoms that follow the bite of a mad dog, the *hydrophobia* or dread of water is the most remarkable.” Johnson, Vol. 1 981.

their Work''' (25). Furthermore, when he introduces Mason and Dixon to the oracle, Dark Hepsie, Mason "smoaks" that Fang "is pursuing an entirely personal End," which is immediately confirmed as we perceive elements of this dog's life quite apart from our attendance, and witness the comical yet appealing urbanity with which he leaves the scene, and the novel. Fang is speaking to Hepsie:

"Angelo said there'd be a Package for me?"  
 "Quotha! Am I the Evening Coach?" The two rummage about in the Shadows. "Look ye, I'll be seeing him later, and I'll be sure to ask,—" "  
 "Just what you said last time," the Dog shaking his head reprovingly.  
 "Here, then, — a Sacrifice, direct from me own meager Mess, a bit of stew'd Hen, — 'tis the best I can do for ye today."  
 "Peace, Grandam, — reclaim thy Ort. The Learnèd One has yet to sink quite *that* low." The Dog, with an expressive swing of his Head, makes a dignified Exit, no more than one wag of the Tail per step. (25-6)

Fang, then, who remains an important touchstone for the protagonists throughout the novel, here embodies the sense of *versions* of reality that inheres in this bizarre world in which Mason and Dixon have found themselves: he is both a real character, and a talking dog, and an agent of the narrative's evocation of multiple modes of representation — his disquisition on evolution signifies in terms of anachronistic humour, his vaudeville routine smacks of animation, while his sniffing and pissing *look like* the behaviour of a normal Norfolk Terrier. Mason and Dixon are also in this world, but they are not entirely of it. While readers encounter it as a world of representation, the protagonists encounter it as an undeniable reality (despite their better judgement) because it is happening *there*, in front of them. (Hence the music they hear, which in film the audience perceives as merely an additional effect, is undeniably real to them.)

This is a paradigm that I want to explore throughout this discussion. Mason and Dixon are figured as a midpoint, and epistemic meeting point, between the readers and the narrative representations of the novel: they are the humanist focus, because of their reality status, that lends meaningfulness, and ultimately a non-ridiculous sentimental bias, to readers' encounters with

this world of otherwise capricious representation. The reality status of the protagonists is manifest to us only within this novelistic world, but our sense of their coming also from *our* world means that we approach them as belonging to both: our sentimental feelings at our apprehension of their lives rests on our dual conceptions of them as immediately present to us while remaining inescapably locked within mere representation, infected by its absolute otherness from what we like to regard as the real. This, as I have argued, is the basic dynamic for the hopeless operations of sentiment: in our lives, the appallingly intractable otherness of others; and in fiction, their ultimate inaccessibility within the text. If modernism sought to abolish sentiment through a concentration on the mundane within narrating operations that destabilised narrative authority and emphasised with unwavering commitment the representational quality of its own realism, *Mason & Dixon* points to a perverse counter-phenomenon within that tradition: modernism has rendered nineteenth-century realism a hackneyed mode, meaning we are less likely to be captured by the sentimental pang of encountering there a perceptibly real and moving humanity inside the barriers of representation, but the quintessentially modernist narrative moves of *Mason & Dixon* create just that possibility. By situating sentimental human concerns amidst the operations of self-conscious representation, this novel reinvigorates the essential tension that remains at the heart of sentimentalism in modern fiction.

### **Mason Encountering Fang**

I am concentrating at this point on Mason's character, so it is interesting to consider how this comes into focus in the context of Fang's otherworldly appearance. Mason accepts, but is confounded by, this apparition of a talking, singing and dancing learned dog, and the "Philosopher-Fool" in him is quickly awakened, with Dixon noting that he



seems fallen into a sort of Magnetickal Stupor, as Mesmerites might term it. More than once, Mason looks ready to leap to his feet and blurt something better kept till later in the Evening. At last the Dog recognizes him, tho' now he is too key'd up to speak with any Coherence. After allowing him to rattle for a full minute, the Dog sighs deeply. "See me later, out in back." (19)

Despite the injunction already given against questions "*Ministerial*," this is precisely the area of Mason's growing obsession. As he puts it to Dixon:

"Why mayn't there be Oracles, for us, in our time? Gate-ways to Futurity? That can't all have died with the ancient Peoples. Isn't it worth looking ridiculous, at least to investigate this English Dog, for its obvious bearing upon Metempsychosis if nought else, — " (19)<sup>6</sup>

When Mason is finally able to speak with Fang, his enquiry is put thus:

"'There is something I must know,' Mason hoarsely whispers, in the tone of a lover tormented by Doubts, ' — Have you a soul, — that is, are you a human Spirit, re-incarnate as a Dog?'" (22). When Fang introduces Mason to Hepsie we learn the true nature of his search for some kind of spiritual enlightenment at the hands of this dog:

Instantly, Mason concludes (as he will confess months later to Dixon) that it all has to do with Rebekah, his wife, who died two years ago this February next. Unable to abandon her, Mason is nonetheless eager to be aboard a ship, bound somewhere impossible, — long Voyages by sea being thought to help his condition, describ'd to him as Hyperthrenia, or "Excess in Mourning." Somehow the Learned Dog has led him to presume there exist safe-conduct Procedures for the realm of Death, — that through this Dog-reveal'd Crone, he will be allow'd at last to pass over, and find, and visit her, and come back, his Faith resurrected. That is as much of a leap as can be expected of a melancholick heart. (25)

Mason's religious and scientific questing, then, is inextricably bound up with the death of Rebekah, which informs a good deal of our sense of his emotional reality in the novel. The sympathy he garners from readers in this and related respects acts in counterpoint to the various manifestations of his "socially stumbling" behaviour — generally, rudeness, awkwardness and arrogance —

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<sup>6</sup> It is virtually impossible to encounter the word "metempsychosis" in modern literature without perceiving a reference to *Ulysses* and the way Molly's rendering, "met him pike hoses" passes through Bloom's mind during the novel; in this context it is suggestive at least of an interesting matrix involving Bloom/Molly and Mason/Rebekah.

leaving us with a “rounded” sense of his character, which is at once, like Leopold Bloom’s, both pathetic and noble.

We witness revealing examples of Mason’s social obliviousness and self-absorption in his and Dixon’s encounter with Hepsie, firstly in that he fails to notice, in contrast to Dixon, that “beneath her layers of careful Decrepitude [there is] a shockingly young Woman hard at work” (26). Given this fraudulence, it is surprising (or in this novel perhaps unsurprising) that Hepsie actually predicts accurately the fate of the *Seahorse*, but to garner this intelligence Mason must first be convinced to charge it to the Royal Society. This is a slight moment but it is nonetheless indicative of Mason’s general ungraciousness: “‘Oh, all right,’ Mason digging laboriously into his Purse, sorting out Coins and mumbling the Amounts.” This return to mundane reality is echoed by a transformation in the register of the scene: Fang has disappeared and the episode with Hepsie proceeds in a realist manner, which continues until the end of the chapter, only equivocated by a song (27-8) that *sounds* like something from a Broadway musical. This return to the “real” is confirmed at the close of the chapter, both in respect to the disappearance of Fang and Hepsie and in the tone of the narration, which returns to a voice appropriate to the chronicling of history:

Later, around Dawn, earnestly needing a further Word with Hepsie or the Dog, Mason can find no trace of either, search as he may. Nor will anyone admit to knowing of them at all, let alone their Whereabouts. He will continue to search, even unto scanning the shore as the *Seahorse* gets under way at last, on Friday, 9 January 1761. (29)

We can see here, then, how Mason’s character is revealed in dialogue with the fluid representational strategies of the narrative. As a human “interface” between the novel’s world of representation and our “real” world, he lends a sense of reality to the fictional world by his apprehension of it in terms of his own subjectivity; at the same time, however, his entrapment within that world means his humanity, which we perceive *by way of that entrapment*, is ineradicably touched by, contained within, the inaccessible. This world of representation in fact draws out the elements of Mason’s character

that we have seen here. The reality status (for him) of Fang brings to the surface his religious anxieties, but this relies on his acceptance of Fang in his own real-world terms. Thus, while at first “fallen into a sort of Magnetickal Stupor,” Mason is reconciled to this magical appearance quickly enough to save a “Mutton Chop” for this “Oracle,” on the assumption that it is “like, I don’t know, perhaps a Bouquet sent to an Actress one admires” (19). When Fang pisses, Mason reacts with a simplistic earnestness that draws readers into a sense of uncomplicated reality inhering within magical representation: “‘This dog,’ Mason singing *sotto voce*, ‘is causing me ap-pre-hen-sion, — surely creatures of miracle ought not to, I mean,...Flying horses? None of them ever — ’” (20).

Likewise, despite his apparent desire to “pass over, and find, and visit” Rebekah, his wish also to “come back” is strong enough for him to find no comfort in Hepsie’s prediction of the *Seahorse*’s being attacked: it is this possibility that sees the scene transform into one of mundanity, with Mason now concerned merely with the question, “[a]re we in danger, then?” (26),<sup>7</sup> leading to his reluctant foraging for the “Half a Crown” this prophetess charges. However, the real-world significance to Mason of his encounters with the miraculous is undiminished by the narrative’s return to a “realist” mode, which is brought home to readers with the information that, even in the historical moment of “Friday, 9 January 1761,” he remains captivated by the possibilities he reads into those encounters.

### Rebekah’s Last Transit

My analysis here aims to approach the bulk of the novel through the lenses of its final section. Concentrating firstly on the character of Mason, this will involve attention to chapters seventy-four and seventy-six, where various important elements of his life are brought into focus. The first and most significant of these is in respect to Rebekah, who makes her final appearance

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<sup>7</sup> The foreshadows Mason’s asking the same question of the Mohawk, Daniel, who tells him: “Yes, of course you are in Danger. Your Heart beats? You live here?...” (653).

(at least as herself) in the novel while Mason is in South Ulster to observe the transit of Venus in 1769. He has just used the *krees* that he acquired in a dream at the Cape (71-2) to (possibly) relocate the Well of Saint Brendan, which has disappeared during a bog-burst:

In an ordinary Dream, Rebekah appears. "No need to feel pleas'd with yourself. What you found was not their sacred Well, but only a *Representation* of it." He wakes up into a midnight sadness, trying to say, I have tasted it, yet he has not tasted it. Now he is afraid ever to, lest his Spring be discover'd as soil'd as the Holy Wells of Gloucestershire, and therefore the *Krees*, and therefore his Dreams. (725)

That this occurs during "an ordinary Dream" is in contrast to her other ghostly appearances during the novel and foreshadows her "with[drawing] into Silence eventually complete" (762). Throughout her appearances, too, she teases Mason with the idea of "Representation," a recurring theme already in the novel. The word in *Mason & Dixon* constitutes an enactment of itself: a mysterious signifier whose meaning cannot be grasped, its evocation rings hollow to the Age of Reason. As I will discuss, Mason's and Rebekah's meetings are characterised by miscommunication, with his "earth-bound Despair" (172) unable to comprehend the messages she brings him from beyond. What Dixon describes as Mason's "Affliction Sentimental" (392) is not tempered by the visits of his dead wife, which he persistently construes in the language of his muddled scientific and spiritual unease. Seeking meaning in meaning, Mason is alienated from Rebekah's seeming perception that "meaning" in life, and in death, is only ever representation. Her injunction to "[l]ook to the Earth" (172) is equally misunderstood, Mason hearing, as I will mention, only her reference to "Tellurick Secrets," but not that "she [the earth] lives," a statement, perhaps, of the only genuinely disgraceless sentimental position, which finds living reality in the inanimate that is also a part of ourselves. Like Mason, however, readers are alienated from Rebekah's speech, which acts as the novel's opposite: rather than translating "our" languages into the representation of another's reality, Rebekah faces the impossible task of translating otherness into the familiar, the possibility of

which can only be entertained by the grossest sentimentalism. In that sense, Rebekah's visits are meaningful to us only in terms of our growing understanding of Mason, who is characterised within our apprehension of his represented reality. To bring us to a conception of the dynamics of Mason's relationship with Rebekah, the novel deals with the matter through a variety of narrating and situational strategies, which I will here unravel.

### **Mason's Women**

As well as a "Philosopher-Fool," Mason is also a socially stumbling romantic, and a brief examination of his disastrous encounters with other women provides a useful subtext for understanding the depth of his feelings for Rebekah. The comical episode at the Cape revolves largely around the impossible situation Mason finds himself in amidst the moral squalor of the Vroom household, where, assailed by the attentions of three adolescent girls and their mother, "[h]e feels stranded out at the end of some unnaturally prolong'd Peninsula of Obligation, whilst about to be overwhelm'd by great Combers of Alien Lusts" (64). It is not until he "is awaken'd by the naked Limbs of a Slave-girl" (64) that the situation is made clear to him. As the girl, Austra, informs him:

All that the Mistress prizes of you is your Whiteness, understand? Don't feel disparag'd, — ev'ry white male who comes to this Town is approach'd by ev'ry Dutch Wife, upon the same Topick. The baby, being fairer than its mother, will fetch more upon the Market, — there it begins, there it ends. (65)

In addition, she goes on to explain, "the Mother will set her three Cubs upon ye without Mercy, and make her own assaults as well, all of it intended to keep *this* rigid with your Desire, — and the only one in the House you'll be allow'd to touch is me." The hideousness of this situation is rendered through an aspect of humour revolving around Mason's inability to extricate himself from it, due mostly to his unworldly susceptibility to feminine attention, whatever its motive. When, for example, the twelve-year-old Els sits on his lap, we are provided with a metonymic statement of his entrapment generally: throughout this passage of the novel, that is, he is constantly

afflicted by an “involuntary, tho’ growing Interest,” with “the Fevers of erotick speculation ever dispell’d by the Cold Bath of Annoyance at himself” (64). Mason’s dignity here is the victim of his naivety with women, and his inability to put an end to this situation means that while he remains in the Vroom household,

he knows he’ll be facing anywhere up to five distinctly motivated Adventuresses, each of whom, as in some fiendish Asian parlor-game, is scheming against the other four, the field having shifted from Motives of Pleasure to Motives of Reproduction and Commerce. Its being for them a given that nothing of a Romantick nature will occur, — nothing does. Mason is usually left with an inflexible Object, which, depending upon the Breeches he’s wearing that day, not to mention the Coat, is more or less visible to the Publick, who at any rate, as it proves, are quite us’d to even less inhibited Displays. (66)

Mason’s idiocy with respect to the opposite sex is equally clear in his briefer encounter with Amelia, “a Milk-Maid of Brooklyn” (399). Complaining in her anachronistic parlance of her family’s disapproval of her wearing black, we witness this exchange, and Mason’s later reflection on it:

“Oh, aye, at home they’re on at me about it without Mercy,” she tells him, “I’m, as, ‘But I *like* Black,’ — yet my Uncle, he’s, as, ‘Strangers will take you for I don’t know what,’ hey, — I don’t know what, either. Do you?”

“How should I — “

“You’re a stranger, aren’t you? Well? What would you take me for?”

Days later, riding back to Brandywine through the Jerseys, he will rehearse endlessly whether she said “would you take me,” or “do you take me,” and ways he might have improv’d upon “Um...,” his actual Reply. She does glance back with an Expression he’s noted often in his life from Women, tho’ never sure what it means. (400)

This after-the-fact reflection on his underdeveloped skills in the art of flirtation reminds us of the retrospective account we are given of Mason’s meeting with Florinda at the hanging of Lord Ferrers at Tyburn. Having caught his eye, this “rising Beauty of the Town” makes an approach:

“Hallo, d’you think he’ll get much of a hard-on, then?” is her Greeting. “They say that agents of Lady F. are about, betting heavily against it.”

Mason gapes in despair. He’ll be days late thinking up any reply to speech as sophisticated as this. (111)

Immediately following this we are given a subjunctive account of how the conversation *might have* proceeded, had Mason been better versed in the mindless pleasures of philandering:

"In my experience," he might say, "'tis usually the Innocent who get them, and the Guilty who fail to."

"How very curious." She will not blink, tho' her nostrils may flare. Her escorts will titter, — and her little Dog Biscuit, alone scenting her onset of interest, will begin to act up. "Could Remorse ever really unman any of you?"

"Why no. — 'Tis rather that Surprise invigorates us."

This imaginary account continues for over a page and a half, and the suggestion is that we are here reading a version of Mason's subsequent "erotick speculation," which involves also, we infer, "the Cold Bath of Annoyance at himself," evident as the imagined scene merges seamlessly back into the "actual" events. The hanging is disrupted when "some kind of problem arises with the new Trap-door Arrangement" of the gallows:

"These frightful Machines!" she pretends to lament, " — shall our Deaths now, as well as our Lives, be rul'd by the Philosophers, and their Army of Mechanicks?"

"That Trap's probably over-constructed," Mason has already blurted, "hence too heavy, and bearing sidewise upon the Lever and Catch, — " He notes a sudden drop in the local Temperature.

"You are...a man of Science, then?" looking about, tho' not yet with Panick.

"I am an Astronomer," Mason replies.

"Ah...existing upon some sort of Stipend, I imagine. How...wonderful..."

(113)

The conversation continues, with Mason becoming increasingly abject. "What he does not, consequently, understand," we are told, "is that, having reckon'd him harmless, she has decided to get in a bit of exercise, in that endless Refining which the Crafts of Coquetry demand, using Mason as a sort of *Practice-Dummy*" (114).

Aside from illustrating Mason's general helplessness in the realm of the erotic, this encounter with Florinda is significant in that it relates directly to his grief for his wife. The reminiscence above is inspired by Mason's re-encountering Florinda at St. Helena in the "real time" of the novel, and it is introduced thus:

The year after Rebekah's death was treacherous ground for Mason, who was as apt to cross impulsively by Ferry into the Bosom of Wapping, and another night of joyless low debauchery, as to attend Routs in Chelsea, where nothing was available betwixt Eye-Flirtation, and the Pox. In lower-situated imitations of the Hellfire Club, he hurtl'd carelessly along some of Lust's less-frequented footpaths, ever further, he did not escape noting, from Pleasure.... (110)

"'Twas then," we are told, "that Mason began his Practice, each Friday, of going out to the hangings at Tyburn, expressly to chat up women, upon a number of assumptions, many of which would not widely be regarded as sane."

Mason's failings with women, then, are to him and us in contrast to the idealism embodied by the figure of Rebekah, which is deeply significant in terms of her appearances in the novel and their meaning for him. This idealism, though, is not uncomplicated, and Mason is constantly wracked with guilt over his treatment of her while she lived. The details surrounding his sense of guilt remain, appropriately, obscure, but an investigation of the various accounts relating to Rebekah avail us of a certain insight.

### **Rebekah (and Susannah) Remembered**

The importance of the subject to Mason's psychology is, as we have seen, announced early, during chapter three, and this impression is reinforced during the voyage to the Cape when Mason is found

morose and silent, beetle-back'd against the Wind, keeping Vigil all day and night of 13 February, the second Anniversary of his Wife Rebekah's passing, touching neither Food nor Drink, — with no one upon the Ship, including Capt. Grant, willing to approach too near.... (52)

It is not surprising in this novel that the first extended account we are given of Rebekah comes with this introductory caveat: "[h]ere is what Mason tells Dixon of how Rebekah and he first met. Not yet understanding the narrative lengths Mason will go to, to avoid betraying her, Dixon believes ev'ry word...." (167). This is also the first putatively meta-metadiegetic narrative in the novel, although it is clearly not told in Mason's voice. It is, however, in the past tense, which emphasises its fictional and idyllic status. The story involves



a glum and lonely young Mason coming close to being killed by a runaway giant cheese at a Randwick cheese-rolling day. Not noting his impending fate until too late, he is rescued “by way of a stout shove, preceded by an energetick Rustling of Taffeta.”

As he arose, slowly, holding his head, blowing out alternate Nostrils, her Voice first reach'd him. “Were it Night-time, Sir, I'd say you were out Star-Gazing.” She put upon her *r* the same vigorous Edge as his Father on a difficult day, — withal, “Star-Gazing” in those parts was a young man's term for masturbating. He might have said something then to regret forever, but her looks had him stupefied [...] He found himself staring at the shape of her mouth, her Lips slightly apart, in an Inquiry that just fail'd to be a Smile, — like a Gate-Keeper about to have a Word with him. What shadow'd Gates lay at her Back? What mystick Residence? (170-1)

While the story may be fictional, the sincerity of Mason's feeling is clear, and this passage is followed by a quoted speech to Dixon, where his depth of feeling is palpable:

“My wish too intently these days, is to re-paint the Scene, so that she might bear somehow her fate in her Face, eyes guarded, searching for small injustices to respond to because she cannot bear what she knows will befall her, — yet Rebekah's innocence of Mortality kept ever intact...oh, shall this divide my Heart? she saw nothing, that May-Day, but Life ahead of her.”

A more “honest,” though no less moving account of the relationship is given after Mason and Dixon have returned to England from St. Helena, which provides an opportunity for the novel to give details of their pasts. There are two analeptic scenes, the first a picnic where Mason tells Rebekah of the future possibility of a trip together to “the far Indies,” “on the sixth of June 1761” (208). This of course brings into focus Mason's mourning on the ship, during a trip he had intended to take with Rebekah. The account following this picnic scene, which, we are told, Mason “tells Dixon” (although when he does is unclear, and this rendering is in the narrator's voice), is the story of how “one night near the Solstice, courting, they decided to ride South, to view Stonehenge by moonlight” (209-10). Both of these scenes are remarkable in this context for the easy and relaxed banter between the two lovers, which contrasts fundamentally with Mason's awkward encounters

with women that I have discussed above and marks as much Rebekah's love for him as his for her. The following pivotal moment is illustrative generally of what I am referring to. Rebekah notes how familiar Stonehenge feels to her and admits that "[w]e did have relations hereabouts." Mason's easiness with Rebekah leads his wit in an unanticipated direction, and he becomes comically flustered; she remains cool, and the sentiment of the moment is rescued:

"Then depend upon it, — if you mark the mass of these Stones, there must've once been full employment 'round here, and for many Years, — some of yours were bound to've been in on it...but dear oh dear, now won't Tongues be a-wag from Bisley to Stroud, — 'Lord in thy Mercy, he's married a Druid!'"

Their rhythm suddenly laps'd, hearing him speak the Verb lately so much upon her mind, — and more so than upon her lips, — having left her, for a moment, abash'd.

He snapp'd his Fingers. "But of course, you *are* Druid, aren't you, — frightfully awkward, tho' how would I've known, you don't *look* Druid particularly, — not as if I'd examin'd you as to religious beliefs or anything, is it.... So! Druid! Well, well, — do you still, eh, put people in those wicker things, and set them on fire? hmm? or have you had a Reformation of your Faith as well?" He was smiling companionably, as if expecting some reply to this.

By surprise, she allow'd herself a merry laugh, made a fist, and slowly but meaningfully brought it to his Mouth. "And in Sapperton they'll say, 'Lord in thy Mercy, she's married an Idiot.'" (210)

Following this, without a line break or any other indication of a scene shift, the narrative jumps forward to Mason and Rebekah's arrival at Greenwich, as he takes up his new position as Assistant to the Astronomer Royal, James Bradley:

And as they ascended for the first time to the Observatory, she gave Charlie another of her open-handed smacks upon the Wig-top. "Druids! You have the Presumption to quiz with me about Druids!"

"Don't fancy it much, hey?" He stood with Bags and Boxes, already aching from the climb, yet aware that this was exactly how he'd prefer to come breezing into his new Position, helplessly burden'd and under affectionate assault by this handsome Lass, this particular one. (210-1)

And a few lines later and we are brought to the heart of Mason's residual fear and guilt:

And what sorts of Looks will she and Susannah be exchanging there in the courtyard of the Observatory, across the wind that bears away ev'rything spoken? — steps from the Zero Meridian of the World, the young Mistress in her Door-way, the Sorcerer's Apprentice's lower-born Wife, with her head inclin'd out of politeness, yet her eyes gazing out of Curiosity.... When does Rebekah begin to suspect that she is there to guarantee her husband's behavior?

This requires some unpacking: Susannah Peach, daughter of Gloucestershire clothier and later Director of the East India Company, Samuel Peach, was the wife of Bradley from 1744, dying young in 1758 during the time when Mason was working under Bradley. After his own death, ownership of Bradley's catalogue of astronomical observations was much wrangled over, eventually falling into the Peach family's hands. Pynchon imagines, or has both the novel and Mason imagine, an intrigue here whereby both Bradley and Mason are subject to manipulations outside their control or understanding. Furthermore, it is postulated that Mason was in love with Susannah from adolescence (they were of similar ages and grew up near each other): indeed, during the cheese rolling episode, before Rebekah's fortuitous appearance, we are told that "[o]f course Mason was there hoping to see Susannah Peach" and are privy to a reverie/fantasy he has about her (169). Earlier than this, also, at St. Helena, a Maskelyne-inspired flashback to Greenwich introduces us to some of Mason's private thoughts on the subject:

And before the Echo had quite gone, in came Susannah, the lightest of dove-gray fans beneath her Eyes, — as if knowing her destiny, Mason thought, ashamed as he did at how it sounded, helpless before the great Cruel Unspoken, — the Astronomer's desire for a son, — and her fear that she might find, in their next Attempt, her own dissolution.... Yes, he had entertain'd such vile Conjectures, as who would not? He'd also imagin'd her lounging about all day, scoffing Sweets, shooing admirers out different doorways whilst admitting others, answering spousal importunities thro' Doors that remain'd shut, issuing Bradley ultimata and extravagant requisitions. Chocolates. A Coach and Six to go to her Mantua-Maker's. A full season's Residence at Bath. A Commission abroad for an Admirer grown inconvenient....

Not all Predators are narrow-set of Eye. In Town, some of the more ruthless Beauties have gone far disguis'd as wide-eyed Prey. Such a feral Doe was Susannah. If Bradley knew of this, 'twas an Article of his sentimental Service long agreed to.

The absence of further children after Miss Bradley was a secret Text denied to Mason. He seeth'd with it, a Beast in lean times, prowling for signs, turn'd by any Scent however contradictory, — or, to a Beast, unbestly. She was back in Chalford. Had she ever slept with Bradley again? Did she have Bradley on her Name, but Mason on her Mind? Did she dream of Mason now as he'd once dreamt of her? Was that Oinking upon the Rooftop? — Their Trajectories never, Mason thought with dismay, even to *cross*, — tho' he'd've settl'd for that, — one passionate Hour, one only, then estrangement eternal, so craz'd had he been after Susannah Peach.

I was only sixteen, upon your wedding day,  
I stood outside the churchyard, and cried.  
And now I'm working for the man, who carried you away,  
And ev'ry day I see you by his side.

Sometimes you're smiling, — sometimes you ain't,  
Most times you never look my way, —  
I'm still as a Mill-Pond, I'm as patient as a Saint,  
Wond'ring if there's things you'd like to say.

Oh, are you day-dreaming of me,  
Do you tuck me in at Night,  
When he's fast asleep beside you,  
Are those Fingers doing right?  
How can Love conquer all,  
When Love can be so blind? and you've got  
Bradley on your Name,  
And Mason on your Mind.... (143-4)

The precise details of Mason's thoughts on this subject are "a secret Text denied" to *us*, but through the passages I am discussing here we get a more compelling insight into the dramatic trajectory of those thoughts. Furthermore, because of the narrating strategies of the novel, this saga is represented from a multitude of perspectives, all issuing perhaps from Mason, but nonetheless taking on a life of their own, representing his turmoil as a complex narrative that, because it is no longer limited to a single, artificial point of view, becomes more than just a paranoid fantasy. For example, in the earlier quote above, "[a]nd what sorts of Looks will she and Susannah be exchanging," the use of the future simple tense, after the past tense that had indicated Mason's reminiscing, implies an outside commentator's perspective, and the access this voice has to Rebekah's thoughts ("When does Rebekah begin to suspect...?") issues from a projected position of omniscience that

reflects the extent and variety of imaginings that prolonged dwelling on an emotional subject can arouse. In this way, the essential emotional factor in the narrative utterance remains Mason's, but it articulates an imprecise and fleeting thought such as pass through the mind without complete capture or reflection. What is achieved is a rendering of Mason's consciousness that dignifies this through its representation as more than simplistic narrative: the freedom of the narrating voice again allows it to represent, without saying as much, a fleeting fraction of Mason's thoughts. More importantly, perhaps, the freedom that this voice establishes for itself allows us, in recognising this, to read through it and into the mind of Mason.

The important dynamic here is Mason's concomitant conflation of, and distinguishing between, the two women — one an idealised, the other a real love. We have already seen the suggestion of this conflation in respect to his images of Rebekah "bear[ing] somehow her fate in her Face" and Susannah "knowing her destiny...and her fear that she might find, in their next Attempt [for a son], her own dissolution," and the true extent of this idea is brought home to us very late in the novel when we learn that Rebekah died giving birth to Doctor Isaac and are told of Mason's "blind grieving, his queasiness of Soul before a life and a death, his refusal to touch the Baby, tho' 'twas not possible to blame him" (768). On top of this, and its attendant guilt, is the suggestion that somehow Mason's meeting with Rebekah was "arranged" by the Peaches, as they also perhaps arranged for Bradley's marriage to Susannah.

Just prior to reading the romantic scenes between Mason and Rebekah that I discussed above, we learn that Mason was afflicted by doubts and overthinking from the beginning:

Rebekah gazed back, an enigma to him, Eve in paradise, — or Eurydice in hell, yet to learn, after it was too late, where she'd been...his mind rac'd with ancient stories. How could he allow that she might have her own story? How could he not choose the easier road, and refer her to some male character, the love-crazy Poet, the tempted Innocent? Was he supposed to light a pipe, pick her up, settle back, and read her all at one sitting? Was this what women wanted? Whom could he ask? (207-8)

Following this there is an imaginary scene between Mason and his father:

“Is she yawny then, too? Nobody’s going to marry you, you young fool, unless there’s something really wrong with her. What do women want? A good provider, not some stargazer who won’t grow up.”

“If the Position at Greenwich—”

“Sam Peach is not your friend. For every effort he makes on yerr behalf, there will be a price, and you may not enjoy paying it when it falls due.”

All subjunctive, of course, — *had* young Mason gone to his father, this *might have been* the conversation likely to result. (208)

Whose imagination is this? Whose subjunctive account? The narrator’s authority in laying claim to it should not fool us: he is representing what Mason *knows* are his father’s ideas, which he suspects, despite himself, to be true. Indeed, we have already witnessed, just a few pages earlier, a “real,” contemporary exchange, with Mason Senior gloating over his son’s being turned away by the Peaches (an episode I am coming to), the older man reminding Mason that he had already told him that Sam Peach was not his friend (203). This subjunctive account, then, is another possible case of Mason’s imagination, or fleeting thought, or dream — or, indeed, those of an ideal creator of textual possibility — being brought to the surface of the novel: we do not access it *through* Mason so much as through the narrator’s established ability to represent *anything*.

The most comprehensive account of these imagined intrigues (which are real to us as they are real to Mason, primarily because they are told not *through* the latter but *for* him) comes with Bradley’s death before Mason and Dixon leave for America. As Mason rides to Chalford to pay his respects “[h]e talks it over with himself,” concluding that “[e]v’rybody knew ev’rything. Except me. I only thought I did...” (185). The first reminiscence is of the early days at Greenwich, when there was some unspecified disharmony between Bradley and Susannah, leading to complex relations among the four. Mason wonders: “Was he fated for these terrible unending four-door Farces? They do not always end luckily, as at the Cape, with ev’ryone’s Blood unspill’d.” Arriving at the Peach home, as his father will later unkindly remind him, “[t]hey advise him, as gently as they’ve ever known how, that Bradley wish’d

only the Family near," so he returns to Stroud as "episodes of the past flick at him like great sticky Webs [...] He is a Warrior who has just lost his Lord."

His thinking turns to "[w]hen young Miss Bradley [Bradley and Susannah's daughter, then without a mother and now without a father also] and Rebekah went thro' their time of infatuation, talking long into the nights" (186). The account Rebekah gives to the young girl of her meeting with Mason is the flipside to the version at the cheese-rolling: her "marriageable years had ebb'd away" and she was approached with an offer, Mason, by a mysterious "Pair of Gentlemen." Again, this scene, *representing* Mason's reflections, is rendered through the voice and method of the primary narrator: we witness the scene, in full realism, creating for us the reality that it has (however fanciful) for Mason. This suspicion of Mason's, made real by the narrator, that Rebekah and his meeting was arranged, is what he was careful to "avoid betraying" of her through the "narrative lengths" of his story to Dixon.

Mason's memories dwell on the deaths of Susannah and Rebekah, tying them, as well as Bradley and him, together in a matrix of emotion, unknown purposes and victimhood (187-9). As the chapter ends, Mason's speculations of conspiracy reach their zenith, as he considers, by way of his suspicion that he and Rebekah have been used, that Bradley's catalogue of observations was possibly the motivating factor behind it all:

Had Susannah been but a means of getting those Obs into the Peach family, and the eager Mittens of Sam Peach, Sr.? Were they the Price of a Directorship in the East India Company? Once there was a child, having done her Job, would the little Operative have been free to return to Chalford, back into the Peach Bosom, whilst her Doting Charge fidgeted about with his Lenses and screw-Settings, at distant Greenwich?

Even Mason's Horse looks back at him, reproachful at this. An ungentlemanly Speculation. Who has not been an indulgent Husband? "Who ever set out to be an old fool with a young Wife?" Mason argues aloud. "Of course he ador'd her, his Governess in all things. How shall I speak?" (189)

Following this, the final paragraph of the chapter involves a curious change of voice for its first three sentences, before it returns to a close narrating of Mason's thoughts. The suggestion in the changed tone, which issues from a nameless authority, is that while Mason's speculations may be wide of the

mark, there *was* another story, a “true” story, behind the sources of his suspicions:

Sam could’ve told Tales’d chill any Father’s Blood. His affections, as ever, with the Doctor, nonetheless, when they wed, did he welcome the Relief. Now may he welcome the Obs, too. Yet Mason, as Bradley’s Assistant, perform’d many of them. Shall he put in a Claim for these? He thinks not, as he was really giving them to Bradley, all, for nothing more than, “Thank you, Mr. Mason, and well done.”

### **Rebekah’s Visits**

This complex network of love, suspicion, jealousy, paranoia and guilt is the emotional context through which we must consider Rebekah’s visits to Mason, and his dreams of her, throughout the novel. Having, in the preceding discussion, moved back and forth through the text, it is useful now to follow Rebekah’s appearances in the order they occur. She first appears on St. Helena, when Mason and Maskelyne journey to the south, and most inhospitable, side of the island:

And here it is, upon the Windward Side, where no ship ever comes willingly, that her visits begin. At some point, Mason realizes he has been hearing her voice, clearly, clean of all intervention— ‘Tis two years and more. Rebekah, who in her living silences drove him to moments of fury, now wrapt in what should be the silence of her grave, has begun to speak to him, as if free to do so at last, all she couldn’t even have whispered at Greenwich, not with the heavens so close, with the light-handed trickery of God so on display. (163-4)

Although Mason perceives early on “that she must come, that something is important enough to risk frightening him too much, driving him further from the World than he has already gone” (164), his guilty obsessions deafen him to her message and the love that abides in her voice. He thinks compulsively in the secular, scientific terms of equilibrium and retribution, wondering: “Is this her redress for the many times he failed to attend her whilst she lived,— now must he go through it and not miss a word?”

Having wandered in the dark to “the floor of a ruin’d ebony forest,” his reaction to meeting her is bathetic: “I can’t have Maskelyne finding me out



here." It is Rebekah who remains composed and familiar, only wondering what would send Mason out into this appalling geography:

"I imagin'd you miss'd me," she replies in her own unmodified voice. Christ. The Moonlight insists she is there. Her eyes have broken into white, and grown pointed at the outer ends, her ears are back like a cat's. "What are you up to here, Charlie? What is this place?"

Mason explains to her the science of his mission, which sounds appropriately ridiculous in the context. Her equanimity remains while his socially stumbling characteristics come again to the fore. In response to his scientific disquisition she responds with gentle kindness, introducing readers to her pet name for him. He, by contrast, is overcome by anxiety and fear:

"But wait till you're over here, Mopery."  
 "You refer to...," he twirls his hand at her, head to toe, uncertain how, or whether, to bring up the topic of Death, and having died. She nods, her smile not, so far, terrible. (165)

This visit is briefly described, and it is not until we witness another (or possibly another instalment of the first) at the close of the cheese-rolling digression, that the substance of what she tells him is availed to us. While in chapter seventy-four, just prior to the dream of Rebekah with which I began this discussion, Mason is still seeking illumination and transcendence in astronomy, in "a purer region, where Mathesis should rule" (723), Rebekah has advised him against this quest as early as this visit on St. Helena, while he remains filled with, and distracted by, "his earth-bound Despair." He assumes she has an insight into the astronomical realms beyond his own earthly knowledge, and he cannot hear, for his guilt, the substance of what she tells him:

"Measuring Angles among illuminated Points, there must be more to it, 'Bekah, you see them as they are, you must."  
 "Oh, Charlie. 'Must.' " Laughter does not traverse easily the baffling of Death, — yet he cannot harden his heart enough to miss the old Note within, — 'tis sure, 'tis his own Rebekah. Her voice affects him like music in F-sharp minor, drawing him to the dire promise. "You believ'd, when you were a Boy, that the Stars were Souls departed."

"And you, that they were Ships at Anchor." She had, once, — as our Sky, a Harbor to Travelers from Ev'rywhere.

"Look to the Earth." she instructs him. "Belonging to her as I do, I know she lives, and that here upon this Volcanoe in the Sea, close to the Forces within, even you, Mopery, may learn of her, Tellurick Secrets you could never guess."

"I've betray'd you," he cries. "Ah, — I should have —

"Lit Candles? I am past Light. Pray'd for me ev'ry Day? I am outside of Time. Good, living Charles,...good Flesh and Blood...." Between them now something like a Wind is picking up speed and beginning to obscure his View of her. She bares her Teeth, and pales, and turns, drifting away, evaporating before she is halfway across the slain Forest. (172)

Something like the same message is repeated much later in the novel. Mason is reading I Corinthians 15:42, talking about resurrection in terms of the stars and planets: "So also is the Resurrection of the Dead":

"Excuse me?" Mason aloud. " 'So also'? I don't see the Connection. I never did."

"Of course not, dear Mopery, — it comes of thinking too much, for there is a Point beyond which Thought is of little Service." It is not Rebekah, not exactly, tho' it may have been one of those clear little Dreams that lead us into the crooked Passage-ways of Sleep, — tho' he would insist, as ever to Dixon, that he was not sleeping at the time of the Visit.

If he does not yet treasure, neither does he cast away, these Lesser Revelations, saving them one by mean, insufficient one, — some unbidden, some sought and earn'd, all gathering in a small pile inside the Casket of his Hopes, against an unknown Sum, intended to purchase his Salvation. (409)

This conflict between Mason's spiritual and moral obsessions, as well as his fear and horror of death, all gathering in the recesses of his mind, becomes again evident when Eliza Fields makes her appearance at the west line and Mason concludes that she is Rebekah's "*Point-for-Point Representation*" (536) and becomes consumed by the idea of "*Transmigration*" (537). He has a dream, "one he has had before," where these deep anxieties come to the fore in a series of images that are both awful and, given what we know of Mason now, evocative of his impossible sentimental disgrace before the life he continues to imagine abiding within death:

Trying to get back to the mill in Wherr, he keeps being set down by carts and coaches farther and farther away...all at once he and Rebekah are traveling together, on foot, till they are pick'd up by a Stranger in a Coach and taken to a House whose residents she knows, where she is seduced, not entirely

against her will, by this band of foreign, dimly political, dimly sinister men and women. She lies still, passive, allowing them all to handle her. Mason, in despair, watches a kind of lengthy Ritual. He does not intervene because she has told him, in painfully direct language, that he no longer has the right. Once she flicks her eyes toward him, as if to make sure he's looking...but only once, and briefly. Who are they? what is their mission? *their Name?* (538)

He reads this as a vision of death and associates it with the French and his own experiences under attack on the *Seahorse*. Rebekah speaks with her seducers in a language he cannot understand, "without pause for breath. For where breath has ceas'd, what need for the little pauses of mortal speech, that pass among us ever unnotic'd?" (539). In addition to his concerns about mortality, though, his more mundane anxieties also enter this frightful dream:

His father appear'd. "And give some thought to your spinsterr there, so abandon'd and gay. You'rre a genius at pickin' 'em, Boy. It has only now come to light, how she was the thrown-aside toy of a Leadenhall Street Nabob, who visits your dearr friends the Peaches now and then for East India business, and country Sport, — and their attentions to you are conditional upon your marrying her."

They were together in a room. She was about to depart. "I commend you upon your Forbearance, Madam. Most Christian."

"You mean considering all that your Father has said about me. Why, Sensibility, — 'tis nothing to me anymore. Pray release yourself."

He felt he had to go on. "'Twas never you, 'Heart, 'twas me he wish'd to wound. — "

"On second thought," Rebekah swiftly return'd, "cherish your Antagonism. Let it freeze your souls, both of you. Either Choice lies far from me now." (539-40)

Mason's dreams refer him to an imaginary world of his own, the nature of which is only vaguely apparent to him — a world of suppositions, fears and recriminations, where the unreachable other, death, speaks back to him in all the autonomy his sentimentalism grants it. It is meaningful to him, and to us, in its representation of, rather than window into, that aspect of his mind. This is where, as I have argued, meaningfulness inheres in this novel, where all is representation. Mason's consciousness is dramatised, in this case through his dreams, but here the representation of the dream becomes literalist, evoking for us its reality for Mason.

Likewise, Rebekah herself, as we are repeatedly reminded, is merely a representation, a truth that Mason insistently refuses to accept. She is a moral focus in the novel that (like the novel) signifies as signification, as the rhetoric that lies behind any such focus, and as such she comes to mean the impossibility of meaning, beyond interpretation and intuition. On the morning following the dream outlined above, the living version of Rebekah's impossible distance, Eliza Fields, now representing the life-world's sentimental equation – where the impossible other enjoys a lambent flickering between autonomy and capture – is seen to articulate the pleasurable pang of this healthy sentimentalism. We find her, then, Rebekah's "representative in the waking world, pale and distant [...] A little less solid each day, she is drifting toward her own Absence" (540). Eliza informs Mason, in fact, that she is going off with Zsuzsa Szabó, to "be Adventuresses." The latter appears, embraces her "*kicsi káposta*" ("little one" in Hungarian), and the two "smile and stretch, glowing like cheap iron Stoves burning Heart-Wood in the Dark, just that distance from no light at all" (540). Presence in this sentence moves from the powerfully rendered to the fleeting, because presence has no ultimate privilege in this novel, but in the apprehension of living presence there remains the possibility of mutual autonomy and mutual readings of the other.

Rebekah is not, in some reductionist sense, merely a symbol of Mason's own consciousness, but she can be regarded to some extent as a site for his, and our, reading of meaning. After a line break from the above appearance of Eliza and Zsuzsa, we learn that "Rebekah, her eyelids never blinking, for where all is Dust, Dust shall be no more, confronts him upon surfaces not so much 'random' as outlaw [...] in the penumbra of God's concern." Mason seeks out these appearances in the already ghostly and transitory:

Moving water [...] the rock Abysses and mountainsides, leaves in the wind announcing a Storm,...Shadows of wrought ironwork upon a wall,...the kissing-crusts of new-baked loaves.... On the Indian warrior paths [...] in the lanes overgrown of abandoned villages at the turn of the day, in the rusted

ending of the sky's light, in the full eye of the wind, she stands, waiting to speak to him.

There is hopelessness here: "What more has she to say? He has long run out of replies." This is in part the hopelessness of the "dire promise" he was earlier drawn to, a promise of faithfulness to the dead, but equally, and synechdocically, it is the hopelessness of finding real presence in the human world of representations and interpretations—or in a novel. Zsuzsa and Eliza find in each other a fleeting glow at an asymptotically fragile "distance from no light at all," and this subsists purely by the mercy of their imaginations. This mercy, though, shot through with sentimental anxiety, is the human factor that makes existence bearable. It is also, of course, linked here to God's mercy, which Cherrycoke refers to in respect of transubstantiation in the Eucharist. Mason has already provided the moment for the articulation of this, apropos Rebekah's ghostly appearances:

[...] her plainly visible Phantom attends Mason as if he were a Commissioner of Unfinish'd Business, representing Rebekah at her most vital and belov'd. Is this, like the Bread and Wine, a kindness of the Almighty, sparing him a sight he could not have abided? (171)

In respect to the dead Rebekah, the alternative, "too merciless to bear," is the absolute statement of the otherness that we seek to deny in others—the otherness of death and absolute alienation, the pure articulation of otherness and disgrace:

At times he believes he has almost seen black Fumes welling from the Surface of her Apparition, heard her Voice thickening to the timbres of the Beasts...the serpents of Hell, real and swift, lying just the other side of her Shadow...the smell of them in their long, cold Waiting— He gazes, at such moments, feeling pleasurably helpless. She occupies now an entirely new angular relation to Mercy, to those refusals, among the Living, to act on behalf of Death or its ev'ryday Coercions,— Wages too low to live upon, Laws written by Owners, Infantry, Bailiffs, Prison, Death's thousand Metaphors in the World,— as if, the instant of her passing over having acted as a Lens, the rays of her Soul have undergone moral Refraction.

As I will discuss at a later point, a significant moment in the relationship between Mason and Dixon surrounds their own "refusals [...] to act on behalf

of Death”: commitment to social justice, an act of hopelessness akin to that of love for either the living or the dead, is in this respect a sentimental act *par excellence*. “[F]eeling pleurably helpless,” by the same token, is the fraught experience of sentimental disgrace – investing ourselves, hopelessly, in another, or a version of what they are, such as we find in the sentimental experience of fiction.

Mason’s commitment to Rebekah, then, becomes an overarching symbol for the sentimental experience, at once hopeless and disgraceful, imaginative and seductive. In the passage above, where we found her “waiting to speak to him,” she and he have passed beyond the possibility of communicating across the void: the sentimental commitment consists in remembrance and silence, forsaking whatever was “important enough to risk frightening him too much” and settling comfortably into the euphemisms of impossible meaning. From “[h]e has long run out of replies,” the passage continues with Rebekah’s speech:

“Then I am not she, but a *Representation*. This Thing,” – she will not style it, “Death.” “I am detain’d here, in this Thing...that my Body all the while was capable of and leading me to, and carried with it surely as the other Thing, the Thing our Bodies could do, together...,” she will not style it, “Love.” Has she forgotten Words, over there where Tongues are still’d, and no need for either exists? (540-1)

Having mutually understood the futility of communicating across death, Rebekah’s next, and final, ghostly appearance to Mason is of a quite different tone. It is as if they have become easy with each other at last, talking no longer of the essential, but of the mundane. Recognising the impossibility of absolute access to the other, she and Mason can speak together rather like old friends: again, then, the sentimental is paradoxically affirmed by way of its own inbuilt asymptotic limit, and as the history of the novel teaches us, it is the sentiment of the mundane that abides. This is two pages before the end of chapter seventy-two, the last, aside from the fanciful chapter seventy-three, of their time in America. Mason has just shown Dixon the epitaph he has written for himself, which ends with a reference to his last remaining dream, which

we infer is to be together again with Rebekah, while we are told that, as he now understands, “[t]hat other Tract, across the Border, — perhaps nearly ev’rything, perhaps nearly nothing, — is denied him” (703).

Easy with the subject at last, he complains to Dixon that “[s]he only wishes me back in the stink of mills, mutton-grease, Hell-Clamor, Lanthorns all night, the People in subjection, the foul’d wells of Painswick, Bisley, Stroud, styling it ‘Home,’ — Oh there is no deliverance!” There is reluctant jocularity here, an awareness that of course there is no deliverance, that Rebekah’s desire for him to be home is more for his, and their sons’, sake than for hers. If the apprehension of mortality gives us access to other souls, the best lesson those souls can teach is an affirmation of the apprehension; rather than death as perceived in the sentimental inanimate, it is death that honestly instructs us that “Flesh is sooner or later Meat” (769) that represents the only real affirmation there is. Following the above passage, then, towards the very end of Mason and Dixon’s time together, Rebekah makes her appearance:

She accosts him one night walking the Visto. “Seems sad, doesn’t it,” she chuckles. “Trust me, Mopery, there are regions of Sadness you have not seen. Nonetheless, you must come back to our Vale, ’round to your beginning, — well away from the sea and the sailors, away from the Nets of imaginary Lines. You must leave Mr. Dixon to his Fate, and attend your own.”

“You don’t care for him, do you?”

“If we are a Triangle, then must I figure as the Unknown side.... Dare you calculate me? Dead-reckon your course into the Wilderness that is now my home, as my Exile? Show, by Projection, Shapes beyond the meager Prism of my Grave? Do you have any idea of my Sentiments? I think not. Mr. Dixon would much prefer you forget me, he is of beaming and cheery temperament, a Boy who would ever be off to play. You were his playmate, now that is over, and you must go back inside the House of your Duty. When you come out again, he will no longer be there, and the Dark will be falling.” (703-4)

This is on the one hand a statement of conservatism, but at the same time it represents an insight into a reality — mortality — that Mason (and Dixon) eventually understands. In this respect, Rebekah occupies the truer side of a perpetual conflict in Mason between the romantic and the realist, the former seeking transcendence in “pure mathesis,” the latter wanting peace with his family and himself.

The contradiction is never fully reconciled in the novel, of course, but rather it abides throughout and is another essential focus of Mason's quest for fulfilment. Mason, too, is aware of it as early as his time at St. Helena:

Maskelyne is the pure type of one who would transcend the Earth, — making him, for Mason, a walking cautionary Tale. For years now, after midnight Culminations, has he himself lain and listen'd to the Sky-Temptress, whispering, Forget the Boys, forget your loyalties to your Dead, first of all to Rebekah, for she, they, are but distractions, temporal, flesh, ever attempting to drag the Uranian Devotee back down out of his realm of pure Mathesis, of that which abides. (134)

Despite popular perception, modern science is a sentimentalist art: particularly in the eighteenth century — in the wake of Newton — searching for the intuitive inductive leap that imagines a useful principle governing observed phenomena, the scientist works by a faith in the possibility of overcoming the divide between the chaos of experience and a postulated (though possibly partial) coherence in nature. A self-aware commitment to knowing the unknowable, an asymptotic reaching towards wholeness and closure, is, as I have been suggesting, an essential feature of the sentimental, and the common idea that science is a realm of the hard and fast, the circumscribed and contained, reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the discipline, mistaking it for such a derivative practice as engineering. At the same time, though, when the scientific outlook becomes enamoured with an image of "reality" as the telos of the art, this investment of the human into the inanimate takes on an increasingly dispiriting hue. Thus Mason's ongoing romantic quest for transcendence through astronomy, inspired by Bradley's description of nutation and aberration, is a significant site for his own sentimental disgrace in the novel. This is in conflict with Rebekah's own injunctions, firstly to "[l]ook to the Earth," and secondly to return to "the House of [his] Duty," and it is this conflict, between the idealism of the scientific mission and the realities of secular life, that I will now turn to in this exploration of Mason's character.



## The Philosopher-Fool

The sentimentalism of the scientific quest, in its eschewal of the human, is in this sense an articulation of “pure” or transcendent sentiment, removed from that which grounds the phenomenon in the mundane and thereby lends it emotional meaningfulness. Science in this respect can be an attempt to enjoy the sentimental experience without incurring the immense debtorship for the thing done: by transferring the object of quest from the human other to the cosmological, inanimate, other, responsibility, sacrifice and death are sidestepped in the name of a “greater truth.” While Maskelyne is a “walking cautionary Tale,” Mason remains conflicted by the ideologies that are alternatively represented by this figure and Rebekah.

Following the “cautionary Tale” paragraph, for example, there appears this quote from Maskelyne, illustrating the idea:

“For if each Star is little more a mathematick Point, located upon the Hemisphere of Heaven by Right Ascension and Declination, then all the Stars, taken together, tho’ innumerable, must like any other set of points, in turn represent some single gigantick Equation, to the mind of God as straightforward as, say, the Equation of a Sphere,— to us unreadable, incalculable. A lonely, uncompensated, perhaps even impossible Task,— yet some of us must ever be seeking, I suppose.” (134)

Rather than marking a contrast with Mason, however, this recalls his own self-justifications to Bonk at the Cape: “Surely, at the end of the day, we serve no master but Him that regulates the movements of the Heav’ns, which taken together form a cryptick Message [...]” (59). Furthermore, as I will discuss, Mason’s obsessions with this kind of deistic theorising remain with him until his death. However, this ideological identification with Maskelyne is in conflict with Mason’s preterite status, his inability to “[f]orget the Boys, forget [his] loyalties to [his] Dead,” and his entrapment within the human and the mundane. While Maskelyne succeeds in his scientific ambitions, Mason is passed over and all but forgotten to history: as he comments to himself in chapter seventy-four, trudging through the Irish mud: “Bogs are my Destiny [...] Stars and Mud, ever conjugate [...]” (723-4).

The naivety of the Mason's belief that science is a realm entirely apart from the secular is noted by Dixon when, to Mason's despair, Maskelyne is made Astronomer Royal while they are working on the west line:

Either Mason cannot admit there's a Class problem here, or, even this deeply compromised, he may yet somehow keep Faith that in the Service of the Heavens, dramatic Elevations of Earthly Position are to be expected of these Times, this Reign of Reason, by any reasonable man. (438)

Maskelyne thus figures in the novel as Mason's "other" twin, illustrating that to "transcend the Earth" requires also a degree of earthly advantage and secular corruption. Mason's mistake lies in his believing that stars and mud *should not* be conjugate, in his sentimentalising of the scientific sentimental. As with the human sentimental, it is the drama of the transcendent possibility and its concomitant refusal that illuminates the sentiment of incompleteness at the heart of the scientific project. Unable to pass over into the space of pure illumination, or find a human world enjoying an incorruptible "Reign of Reason," Mason's thwarted scientific ambitions (despite his scientific skills) echo his thwarted spiritual desires in respect to Rebekah.

This tension is given a suggestive treatment in chapter seventy-four, where we find Cherrycoke quoting Maskelyne's approval of Mason's "moral reflections on the subject" of "a 10-foot telescope with a micrometer" (720). This occurs during the final passage of unmediated movement between diegetic levels that I drew attention to in my previous chapter. In the frame context, Cherrycoke suggests they may "speculate as to the form" Mason's "moral reflections" might have taken. Mid-paragraph his voice loses quotation marks, and the speculation continues in the ambiguous rendering of the narrator (although the *sound* of Cherrycoke's voice persists). "Whatever Mason had to say," we are told, "almost certainly included G-d," and the passage continues with this postulate:

Suppose he'd written to Maskelyne, —  
 "...Tis the Reciprocal of 'as above, so below,' ...being only at the finer Scales, that we may find the truth about the Greater Heavens,...the exact value of a Solar Parallax of less than ten seconds can give us the size of the Solar system.

The Parallax of Sirius, perhaps less than two seconds, can give us the size of Creation. May we not, in the Domain of Zero to One Second of Arc, find ways to measure even That Which we cannot,— may not,— see?" (721)<sup>8</sup>

In a more than usually ambiguous narrating realm, this representation of Mason's searching for God within the possibilities of astronomy brings home to us the extent to which our understanding of his character (and the novel) is based on such speculation and interpretation, a reading sensibility that invests knowingly in this manifestly superficial rendering of human depth. As I am arguing here, it is our subjective vacillation between reading the novel as pure representation and deep characterisation, the mutual incompatibility of these, and our imaginative work within this, that informs our sentimental responses.

Thus, we approach with a multiple consciousness a critical passage four pages later. Rebekah has just made her dream appearance assuring Mason that he found "only a *Representation*" of the Well of Saint Brendan, when Mason at the telescope "experiences a curious optical re-adjustment":

The Stars no longer spread as upon a Dom'd Surface,— he now beholds them in the *Third Dimension* as well,— the Eye creating its own Zed-Axis, along which the star-chok'd depths near and far rush both inward and away, and soon, quite soon, billowing out of control. He collects that the Heavenly Dome has been put there as *Protection*, in an agreement among Observers to report only what it is safe to see. Fifteen years in the Business, and here is his Initiation. (725)

From a twentieth-century point of view, we find a suggestion here of Mason's seeing space as we see it today, in terms of the kinds of astronomical distances that have been known since, firstly, the trigonometric parallax method used from the late 1830s to accurately measure the distance to nearby stars,<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> The "presence" of Cherrycoke in this speculation is enhanced by his speech which follows this paragraph, where he admits to "find[ing] congenial the Mathematics, particularly the science of the fluxions" (differential calculus), where the concept of the limit (or, as Cherrycoke puts it, "*Defective Zero*") includes the infinite within the miniscule: "Is it the Infinite that tempts us, or the Imp?" At the same time, however, this theme is also broadly Pynchonian, being familiar from *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*.

<sup>9</sup> This emphasises the historical accuracy of the narrator's claim, on just the second page of his narrative, that "the Times are as impossible to calculate, this Advent, as the Distance to a Star" (6).

then the photometric and spectroscopic methods of, respectively, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which allowed for hundreds and then thousands of star distances to be accurately determined.<sup>10</sup> In this sense the passage figures Mason as something of an unknowing prophet, whose mental conception of the cosmos undergoes an instantaneous transformation, from seeing a Copernican “dome” to perceiving the “billowing” (and inconceivable) depths that even non-specialists are at least vaguely aware of today. From that point of view the idea of the dome as “*Protection*” recalls the references we have already seen to God’s mercy, which, prior to the technological advancement of modernity, sheltered humanity from knowledge of the impossible vastness of space.

From another point of view, however, we can note that the Copernican vision of the dome was already waning in Mason’s historical time. As early as 1698, Christiaan Huygens, in his work, *Cosmotheoros*, had argued that the Sun was a star, and further:

that all these Stars are not in the same Sphere, as well because there’s no Argument for it, as that the Sun, which is one of them, cannot be brought to this Rule. But it’s more likely they are scatter’d and dispersed all over the immense spaces of the Heaven, and are as far distant perhaps from one another, as the nearest of them are from the Sun.<sup>11</sup>

Descartes also believed in an infinite universe, and, further to this, in 1720/21, Edmund Halley had presented two papers to the Royal Society arguing for a three dimensional space filled with stars, and in 1767 (two years prior to Mason’s “revelation”), John Michell made similar arguments in a paper in *Philosophical Transactions*. Both these arguments were intuitive postulates, based on the relative brightness of the various stars. From 1784, also, William Herschel was working on a three dimensional model of the Milky Way.<sup>12</sup> In

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<sup>10</sup> See Asimov, 58-62; 85-110.

<sup>11</sup> Huygens, 145. This work was in fact completed in 1695, the year of Huygens’ death, but was not published until 1698.

<sup>12</sup> For discussions of the the infinite universe, see Harrison, *Masks*, 81-100; on Descartes, see Hoskin 135-41 and Harrison, *Darkness* 55-67; for reproductions of Halley’s papers, see Harrison, *Darkness* 218-20.

other words, Mason's insight comes at around the time that the accepted view of space was in a process of transition, from that of a sphere with stars arranged two dimensionally, to that of an expanse with stars scattered throughout. In this respect, the "here is his Initiation" line is more grounded in real history, and the suggestion is of Mason intuiting, but recoiling from, a shifting paradigm.

More generally, though, the three-dimensional insight is a reflection of Mason's discomfort at the endlessness and necessary incompleteness of the scientific project: rather than discovering a "cryptick Message," astronomy and cosmology have moved unerringly, asymptotically, towards "That Which we cannot, — may not, — see," and into the realm of what Cherrycoke calls "Epsilonics and Infinitesimalisms" (721). As I will discuss below, Mason's sentiments have difficulty accepting the boundlessness of scientific enquiry, questing, as he does, to tie astronomy into some "unifying theory" that includes not only the physical universe but also God. The sentimental hopelessness of this is what Mason cannot confront, as he cannot confront the hopelessness of his abiding love for his dead wife, leading to his eventual anxious abandonment of the stars, "which somehow had begun to take on for him attributes of conscious beings":

attacked by Vertigo if he continu'd too long at the eye-piece, lost in terror before the Third Dimension, indeed running, when there was a choice, to Earth rather than to Fire, desperate to pretend all was well, face kept as clear as the bottom of a stream in August, nothing visible at the fringes of readability, — who knew him, truly? What might wait, at the margins of the pool, mottled, still, river-silt slowly gathering upon its dorsal side? (731)

The third dimension Mason perceives is like a final assault on his faith in the possibility of being more than a sentimentalist — of actually recovering wholeness in the apprehension of the other. In love this has been denied him through the corruptibility of earthly passions and, ultimately, death; in astronomy it eludes him through the incompleteness of the scientific project. Aside from the memories of Rebekah that we have looked at, Mason's only

other recollected moment of happiness involves the stars and a fleeting instance of family harmony:

Mason remembers from his youth a Market-Night, all of them in the bed of the Waggon, lumbering home late from Stroud. The Sun went down, and the Stars came out, and Charlie went on about the Stars. "The school-Master calls it Ursa Major, The Bigger of two Bears, and that's the Little one, there."

"My Father call'd it 'the Baker's Peel,' " his father told him.

"Mine always said 'Charles's Wain,' " recall'd his mother. "Charles was the Name of a great king, over in France."

"Hurrah!" cried Hester, " — here we all are, riding in Charles's Wain!" and it was one of the few times he could remember his Father laughing too. (653)

Mason has this memory towards the end of his time on the west line, uncomfortably far from Philadelphia, the Native American contingent having arrived, bespeaking the moment when, as Hugh Crawford puts it, "something [will] require[s] an unpremeditated cessation to the Line" (672). The reverie continues, calling attention both to Mason's young hopes, growing fascination, and the impossibility of fulfilment he has found:

Mason look'd up at his Parents' Faces, turn'd aside, under a great seeded Sky without a moon, under the unthinkable leagues of their Isolation. He would remember them all together like that, as if they liv'd at the edge of some great lighted Sky-Structure, with numberless Lanthorns hung and Shadows falling ev'rywhere, and pathways in, upon which once having ventur'd, he might account his life penetrated, and the rest of it claim'd.

He thought he knew ev'ry step he had taken, between then and today, yet can still not see, tho' the dotting of ev'ry last *i* in it be known, how he has come to the present Moment, alone in a wilderness surrounded by men who may desire him dead, his Kindred the whole Ocean away, with Dixon his only sure Ally.

## Of Ducks

In the realm of the rational, then, Mason is afflicted by his earthly doubts, and, socially stumbling, this philosopher-fool cannot advance in, or even find, "a purer region, where Mathesis should rule." On the one hand, he evinces a faith in the rational, which spills over into irascible contempt towards any who are not slaves to its dictates; on the other, he is himself forever seeking,

as we have seen, signs of something from beyond the confines of reason.<sup>13</sup> He is attracted to the revered institutions of science but is unable to find acceptance into their inner sancta. A sentimentalist paranoid, he cannot separate the areas of his obsessions, which swing maniacally between the earthly and the transcendent. Stars and mud are as much conjugate in his mind as in his experience, each infecting the other with their incompatible sentimentalisms. I will now examine how this hopeless dynamic and the conflicts it implies are borne out in the novel, firstly in a brief passage relating to the duck, which we can treat as paradigmatic, and secondly in respect to an abiding theme in Mason's consciousness, the removal of eleven days from 1752 due to the calendar reform of that year.

In chapter forty-five we witness again the way the ontological and epistemological conditions of the novel depend not on a coherent "realism" as much as on the dictates of possibility contained within modes of signification. The chapter begins with an ironic account of a growing mythology surrounding the duck, which is both a fanciful diversion as well as a comment upon the twentieth-century phenomenon of the superhero:

Back Inhabitants all up and down the Line soon begin taking the Frenchman's Duck to their Bosoms, for being exactly what they wish to visit their lives at this Moment, — something possess'd of extra-natural Powers, — Invisibility, inexhaustible Strength, an upper Velocity Range that makes her the match, in Momentum, of much larger opponents, — Americans desiring generally, that ev'ry fight be fair. Soon Tales of Duck Exploits are everywhere the Line may pass. The Duck routs a great army of Indians. The Duck levels a Mountain west of here. In a single afternoon the Duck, with her Beak, has plow'd ev'ry Field in the County, at the same time harrowing with her Tail. That Duck! (448)

At the same time, however, we are immediately told that "[a]s to the Duck's actual Presence, Opinions among the Party continue to vary," and we are soon assured that the men of science, Mason and Dixon, "attempt to ignore as much of this as they may, both assuming 'tis only another episode of group Folly" (449). Mason of course is particularly irascible on the subject: "They'll

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<sup>13</sup> David Cowart has made this observation in "The Luddite Vision" 347.

believe what they like, in this Age, with its Faith in a Mechanickal Ingenuity, whose ways will be forever dark to them. God help this Mobility.”

The narrative swings, then, from an anachronistic simulation of the duck as an eighteenth-century comic-book superhero to, within that context, an affirmation of Mason and Dixon’s reality status, but as Mason’s speech concludes, this realism is once again subject to the fantastical. Mason is speaking:

“[...] The Axmen have a need for artificial Life as perverse as any among the Parisian *Haute Monde*, and this French toy, conveniently invisible, seems to — ”

“Look out!” Dixon cries. Mason’s Hat leaves his head and ascends straight up to the Tree-tops, where it pauses, catching the rays of the Sun, just gone behind tomorrow’s Ridge-top. Faint Quacking is heard above.

“Very well,” Mason calls, “ ‘Toy’ may’ve been insensitive. I apologize. ‘Device’?”

Armand comes running out. “ ‘Tis being playful, nothing more. Ah, *Chér-i-e*,” he sings into the Sky. “I’ll guarantee their Behavior, — only please return the Gentleman’s Hat, *Merci...*” as the Hat comes down Leaf-wise, zigging one way, zagging another, whilst Mason runs back and forth anxiously beneath.

Not only are Mason and Dixon thus seamlessly drawn into a comic world of the duck’s manifest presence, but, as Armand goes on to explain the duck’s existential woes, we perceive a metaphysical relationship between her and Mason, relating her narcissistic sensitivity to his anxieties as I have been discussing them here:

“[...] the Duck remain[s] primitive, foremost in her readiness to take offense. You must have notic’d, — she has no shame, any pretext at all will do. As her Metaphysickal Powers increase, so do her worldly Resentments, real and imagin’d, *the shape of her Destiny pull’d Earthward and rising Heavenward at the same time [...]*” [Italics added.]

In addition to this, the episode comes to focus Mason’s anxieties and longings more precisely as he, now unreflectively accepting of the duck’s presence and powers, finds here the catalyst for an outburst that, employing Vaucanson’s interest in the transit of Venus as its *raison d’être*, articulates his own confused amalgam of desires:



"Very well, — could it be, that in the Years since the Duck vanish'd, and despite the constant presence of the Duplicate the World knows, Monsieur Vaucanson, in his perusals of the Sky, has come to seek there wonders more than merely Astronomickal? For, having no idea of where or how far his Creature's 'Morphosis may've taken it, where look for Word of its Condition with more hope of success than among the incorruptibly divided Rings of Heaven?"

"Hold, hold," Dixon with exaggerated gentleness, "Mason, he... believes his Duck to've become a Planet, 's what tha're saying?"

"Why are you all edging away from me like that?" Mason's voice pitch'd distraughtly. "For a few moments among the Centuries, we are allow'd to observe her own 'Morphosis, from Luminary to Solid Spheroid...I don't know about you, but if I had a Duck disappear from me that way, I should certainly be attending closely the Categories of rapid Change, such as the Transit afforded, for evidence of the Creature's Passage." Even without the face full of discomfort Mason displays, Dixon would have understood this as yet another gowkish expression of grieving for his Wife. (450)

Chapter forty-five, then, illustrates the manner in which the novel's representational strategies, which eschew any kind of commitment to a consistent underlying world-view, are able to evoke multiple reading sensibilities within a rapidly transitional field of signification. At the same time, this calls up a sense of Mason's uncircumscribable consciousness, which involves perpetual conflict and discourse between the rational, the spiritual and the intuitively theoretical: the latter is the site for an ongoing attempt at reconciling the former two, seeking in the inductive postulate a way to bring together the competing claims of his subjective anxieties. For readers, this is articulated through a humorousness that slides easily between cartoonish absurdity, realist monology and the novel's idiosyncratic mode of anachronistic simulations of eighteenth-century scientific and spiritual-philosophical musings.

## Of Days

A more elaborate example of this is found in respect to Mason's discomfort on the question of the eleven days (the third through to the thirteenth of September) that were removed from the year when England (and the colonies) adopted the "popish" Gregorian calendar in 1752, bringing it into harmony with most of the rest of Europe. This change was instigated by Lord

Chesterfield, who conscripted Royal Society fellow (and president from 1752), the astronomer Lord Macclesfield, and Mason's future employer, James Bradley, to aid him in his calculations. The change was generally unpopular, and apocryphal accounts claim that when Macclesfield's son ran for parliament in 1754 he was taunted by the cry, "give us our eleven days."<sup>14</sup>

The subject arises comically in *Mason & Dixon* after Bradley's death and Mason's unwelcome visit to the Peach home, which I discussed above. The following chapter, nineteen, sees Mason stopping for a drink at The George to find the recently deceased Bradley as "the Topick of vehement Conversation" (190). The tone here captures the popular discourse on the subject as we might imagine it:

"Howbeit, — he was in, don't forget, with Macclesfield and that gang, that stole the Eleven Days right off the Calendar. God may wait, for the living God's a Beast of Prey, Who waits, and may wait for years...yet at last, when least expected, He springs."

"Thank you, Rev, — now when do I get to sell Ale in your Chapel? Sunday be all right?"

"Nay, attend him, — the Battle-fields we know, situated in Earth's three Dimensions, have also their counterparts in Time, — and if the Popish gain advantage in Time's Reckoning, they may easily carry the Day."

"Why, that they've had, the Day and the Night as well, since 'fifty-two, when we were all taken over onto Roman Whore's Time, and lost eleven days' worth of our own."

For the rationalist Mason, "who has just lost his Lord," this is almost intolerable: he "pretends to examine his shoe-buckle, trying not to sigh too heavily. Of the many Classics of Idiocy, this Idiocy of the Eleven Days has join'd the select handful that may never be escap'd."

This leads us to Mason's memory of his debate over the issue with his father at the time:

"Then what of the days between? Macclesfield takes them away, and declares they never were?" With a baffled Truculence in his Phiz that made Mason equally as anxious to comfort the distress it too clearly signal'd, as to avoid the shouting it too often promis'd.

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<sup>14</sup> This collective memory is probably inspired by Hogarth's painting, "An Election Entertainment" (1755), which includes this protest slogan written on a black banner.

"We can call Days whatever we like. Give them names, — Georgeday, Charlesday, — or Numbers, so long as ev'ryone's clear what they're to be call'd."

"Aye Son, but, — what's become of the Eleven Days? and do you even know? you're telling me they're just...gone?" Would he not give this up? (191)

Mason endeavours to lighten the mood here, but attempting to approach the problem through his father's discourse, eschewing his own rationalism, leads him careening into the untrustworthy realms of fluid semantics and his own doubts:

"Cheer ye, Pa, for there's a bright side, — we'll arrive instantly at the fourteenth, gaining eleven days that we didn't have to live through, nor be mark'd by, nor age at all in the course of, — we'll be eleven days younger than we would've been."

"Are you daft? Won't it make my next Birthday be here that much sooner? That's eleven Days older, idiot, — *older*."

"No," said Mason. "Or...wait a moment, — "

"I've people asking me, what Macclesfield will do with the days he is stealing, and why is Dr. Bradley helping him, and I tell them, my son will know. And I did hope you'd know."

"I'm thinking, I'm thinking." He now began to quiz himself insomniac with this, wond'ring if his father had struggl'd thus with Mason's own earlier questions about the World. He invested Precious Sleep in the Question, and saw not a Farthing's Dividend.

Back at The George, the men ask Mason if Bradley ever confided anything on the subject to him, and he decides to take up this opportunity for a "spirited expedition into the Deserts of Idiocy" (192), embarking on a long and ridiculous history of "the infamous conspiracy 'gainst th' Eleven Days." The final three pages of this digression are told mostly by Mason's voice in quotation marks, and involve an elaborate conspiracy to import "Asiatick Pygmies," who were required "to inhabit the Days, yet *not allow the Time to elapse*" (196).

More interesting for my purposes here, though, are the first two pages of the digression (192-4), quite unrelated to the above and told in the voice of the narrator. This involves a scene between Bradley and Macclesfield, which more than anything else is a study in the power relations between the two, with Macclesfield the "master" and Bradley the "servant" (193). This, then, is

a rendering of Mason's own perceptions of Bradley's entrapment within the political world, reminding us of some of Mason's earlier thoughts:

Bradley was fifty-nine that year, Macclesfield four years younger, calling him James this, James that. The older man was in perpetual bad health, did not hunt, ride, nor even fish, had married foolishly, had been entirely purchas'd long ago, Aberration, Nutation, Star Catalogue, and all, tho' he'd denied it successfully to himself.... (194)

However, unlike Mason's previous memories and suppositions, which I discussed earlier and which are clearly represented through his consciousness, the telling of this story, although also issuing from Mason, is translated into the objective clarity of the narrator's voice, representing the scene as "truth," employing the past tense of a "reliable" account. Just as Cherrycoke's narrative is taken "out of his hands" by the main narrator, Mason's receives the same treatment here. Coming on the back of his grief-stricken memories and suppositions of the previous chapter it serves to dignify, by way of its seeming "objectivity," his imaginary reconstruction of the scene. The image here is Mason's, but the removal of his voice also removes it from his responsibility, and his identification with Bradley is consequently not ridiculous or self-indulgent. As I have been arguing, Mason the "Philosopher-Fool" is a perpetual victim of his transcendent aspirations being dragged into the "mud" of corrupted secular life: his conception of Bradley in the same terms, because the scene is so strikingly "true," is represented as sympathetic insight rather than delusional fancy.

The eleven days in that context relate to one area of Mason's conflicts that I have been dealing with here—his inability to reconcile the rational with the human and mundane. In another treatment he gives the question, relating to Dixon the time he spent *inside* the eleven days, the focus is on his more spiritual conflict—Rebekah.<sup>15</sup> This is a fanciful excursion, not intended by

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<sup>15</sup> Mason does, however, articulate clearly here what I found above regarding "his" version of the Bradley story: when admitting that he had hoped of finding the latter also within the eleven days, he tells Dixon that "later, in my Melancholy, I might see more vividly his all-too-earthly connections with Macclesfield and Chesterfield, and beyond them, looming in the mephitic Stench, Newcastle and Mr. Pelham" (557).

Mason to be taken seriously,<sup>16</sup> but his interlocutor is aware of what depths lie behind it:

“[...] in some Desperation, before the Sun rose, I set out. Reasoning that if I had been so envortic’d, why so might others—” breaking off abruptly, a word or two shy (Dixon by now feels certain) of some fatal confidence, that Rebekah would have stood at the heart of. (557)

At this point the narrator’s voice does in fact momentarily take over the story, but, in contrast to the scene between Bradley and Macclesfield, the tone here is light-hearted, suggesting if anything that Mason’s excursion has been a dream. Furthermore, the use of an anachronistic term such as “hooking up” in the paragraph following this one brings this lightness into renewed focus:

Young Charles was to reason eventually, that the pain of separation had lain all upon his side, for she was to bid him good morrow upon the fourteenth, as she had good night upon the second, without a seam or a lurch, appearing to have no idea he’d been away cycling through eleven days without her. Nor had whatever he liv’d through in that Loop, caus’d any perceptible change in the Youth she kiss’d hello “the very next day” in the High Street in Stroud, brazen as a Bell.

Having regained his voice, Mason reaches his peroration and gets to the central theme of his story, justifying Dixon’s intuition:

“This Life,” runs the moral he is able by now to draw for Dixon, “is like the eleven days,— a finite Period at whose end, she and I, having separated for a while, will be together again. Meanwhile must I travel alone, in a world as unreal as those empty September dates were to me then....” (561)

The eleven days, then, are for Mason, and the novel, a focal point for this character’s inability to reconcile the rational, the spiritual and the secular. As we have seen in chapter seventy-four, these issues remain with Mason, who has still not achieved the “transcendence” he has sought throughout. Rather, there is a sense in which his issues are rehearsed and re-rehearsed throughout, with stars and mud still conjugate, with Rebekah now invading his dreams, and with his still finding “moral reflections” in the instruments of

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, it is one of the few occasions where Mason is capable of something like a prolonged “Dixonian” digression.

astronomy. Nonetheless, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, the narrator does advert to Dixon's perception of "the true extent of [Mason's] progress beyond the socially stumbling Philosopher-Fool he began as." That this is largely imperceptible in chapter seventy-four, I maintain, can be accounted for by a final feature of it that I have not yet discussed in detail: the Maskelyne factor.

## Maskelyne

At sixteen pages, chapter seventy-four is a relatively long one in the context of this novel; it is also somewhat strained and disjointed, moving from London, to Mason's dream of the North Cape, to Ireland, into the LeSpark setting, back to Ireland, to Greenwich, to a Maskelyne-inspired flashback at Greenwich, back into the LeSpark house, and ending with another conversation between Mason and Maskelyne. The dreary presence of Maskelyne abides throughout, which is not coincidental: this is Mason's life after Dixon, after adventure in foreign lands; it is a life of piecemeal work for the Board of Longitude and subordination to Maskelyne, the Astronomer Royal. As the narrator tells us:

There's no place for him in London. The city has never found his Heart, and 'tis his Heart that keeps a residue of dislike for the place ever guarded. Likewise must he allow himself to let go of Dixon, soon now.... He sees nothing but Penance ahead, and Renunciations proceeding like sheep straggling back, gathering to shelter. (719)

Maskelyne's shadow is cast upon chapter seventy-four, both in terms of his actual presence and his influence on Mason's consciousness: Mason travels to Ireland "[a]t Maskelyne's Behest" (719); Maskelyne's "long-winded Letters to Mason" (730) are quoted and discussed (720); we witness his pedantic editing of Mason's reports (726-7); in Ireland Mason dwells on "[h]is current scheme," which is "to assail Maskelyne's Sanity, by now and then posing him Questions that will not bear too much cogitating upon" (724); and the final seven pages of the chapter (726-32) are devoted to the Astronomer Royal, his grotesque sartorial tastes, his fantasies, his near-insanity at having to preside over the trials of Harrison's watch (which will eventually make

redundant the lunar method for finding longitude at sea, in which Maskelyne is deeply invested), and, finally, his arranging for Mason to travel to Scotland.

The chapter in this respect is something like a reworking-in-miniature of the St. Helena chapters from earlier in the novel, where a similar effect is achieved. After the entertainment of the Cape passages, on St. Helena Mason and Dixon are separated and Mason is left on this island with the endlessly tedious Maskelyne. Chapter eleven, while Dixon is still present, is taken up mostly with the Florinda episode, which is amusing enough. Chapter twelve, however, introduces the abiding sense of what is to come when it begins with “Mason, Dixon, and Maskelyne [...] sitting like an allegorickal Sculpture titl’d, *Awkwardness*” (116), and ends with Dixon’s departure back to the Cape. With Dixon gone, chapter thirteen is long (twenty-one pages) and, for the reader, hard work, which reflects Mason’s own displeasure at his company (and it is here that we find the reference to Maskelyne’s being “a walking cautionary Tale”). Chapter fourteen is concerned with Dixon’s adventures at the Cape, while fifteen is occupied with Rebekah’s first visit (and Maskelyne’s encounters with the possible ghost, Dieter). Chapter sixteen consists of the cheese-rolling digression, more of Rebekah’s ghost, and Mason’s decision to return to James’s Town without Maskelyne, while chapter seventeen sees Mason trapped in the Jenkin’s Ear Museum, eventually returning to James’s Town, being reunited with Dixon and the two returning to England. Throughout these there is a constant sense of isolation and estrangement, reflecting both Mason and Dixon’s separation and Mason’s discomfort at the close proximity of his unwelcome double, Maskelyne.

As I have said, Maskelyne functions in the novel as Mason’s “other” twin: he is the anti-Dixon, with whom Mason has almost as much regular contact as he does with Dixon;<sup>17</sup> but the idea of *that* novel is inconceivable. Indeed, in chapter seventy-four we are told that “Mason has almost presum’d

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<sup>17</sup> In terms of “real” history, that is, Mason and Maskelyne’s careers would have intersected frequently, with their mutual work on the lunar tables, Schiehallion and Bradley’s observations; moreover, as Astronomer Royal, Maskelyne was effectively Mason’s employer in these matters.

to think of them as old Troopers by now [...] weary veterans of campaigns in which has loomed as well the amiable bean-pole Dixon" (731), but Mason's wariness of Maskelyne, and the latter's malignant personality, precludes the kind of matiness that we find between Mason and Dixon. Maskelyne represents also, of course, everything that Mason fails to be: with a successful career he achieves the "transcendent" escape into astronomy that Mason is drawn to by his questing spirit but repelled from by his earthly visions.

Whenever Maskelyne hovers at the edges of Mason's consciousness, as in chapter seventy-four, the latter remains conflicted by his own failings and limitations: on the one hand he covets Maskelyne's success, while on the other he is repelled by the apparent moral cost of this. In addition, of course, Maskelyne is for Mason the usurping brother who won favour with Bradley while Mason was exiled in America. The novel, however, reworks this dynamic by privileging Mason's humanity and creating its own redemptive art precisely out of the failures of his astronomical ambitions: it is in the mud and squalor of the Cape and America, in company with the earthy, non-transcendent Dixon, that Mason's life is given human (partial, reaching and incomplete – that is, sentimental) meaning in this novel, a novel that in itself is a celebration of the impossibility of complete meaningfulness in the experience of life.

### **Dr. Johnson**

We can see an important suggestion of Mason's "progress beyond the socially stumbling Philosopher-Fool he began as" if we look to his encounter with Johnson and Boswell in chapter seventy-six. Having just visited Dixon on his way to Scotland, Mason is away from the pernicious influence of Maskelyne, and in this encounter he conducts himself, finally, with some of the dignity he has aspired to throughout. We can recall, momentarily, Mason and Dixon's meeting with Benjamin Franklin in America, where, eager to impress, Mason says of Franz Mesmer: "At The Mitre, he is ever reliable as a topick of lively Discourse," at which, we are told, Dixon, constantly frustrated by Mason's



feeble attempts at self-aggrandisement, “may be muttering to himself”: “Where Franklin is a Member, and tha’ve scarcely been a Guest,” upon which he gets up to, as he unpretentiously puts it, “go over the Heap” (268).

This scene with Franklin contrasts with Mason’s more reserved, assured and self-knowing responses when Johnson addresses him in chapter seventy-six:

Sitting at a table, drinking Ale, observing the Mist thro’ the Window-Panes, Mason forty-five, the Cham sixty-four. “You seem a serious young man, with Thames-side intonations in your Voice, if I’m not mistaken.”

“Sir, I saw you at The Mitre Tavern, once.”

“Royal Society, are you.”

“As your own Intonation already implies, Sir, not bloody likely, is it? tho’ I have contracted with them, and more than once.”

“You’re the Star-Gazer, what’s his name.”

“Mason,” Boswell informs him.

“Damme if that’s not it exactly,” says Mason. “Thankee, Gents, altho’ this time I am come upon an Errand of Gravity.” He explains to them his search for a Scottish Mountain, suiting as many as possible of Maskelyne’s Stipulations. (744)

When Boswell then suggests that Maskelyne might be seeking the mountain, not for scientific purposes, but on behalf of his brother-in-law, Clive of India, Mason admits that he “never thought of that,” to which Johnson “somewhat brusquely” responds with advice that is, at least for the reader who is by now well-acquainted with Mason’s confusion amid his worldly and spiritual woes, telling: “Then you are not as corrupted as you believe you are, at least according to the creases of your Phiz, Sir. Such relative Innocence may be a sacred Asset, yet a secular Liability. May you ever distinguish the one from the other” (745). In the context of this novel, where Benjamin Franklin is a night-club performer of electrical tricks and George Washington a pot-smoker, where verisimilitude is a myth and all is self-conscious representation through culturally inflected lenses, this realist rendering of Johnson, offering thoughtful council to Mason, comes like an act of beneficence from the novel to its long-suffering anti-hero. This is not to say that this account *is* realist as such: as I have quoted earlier, Uncle Ives has already “snort[ed]” that Johnson and Mason probably “didn’t pass within a hundred miles” of each other; and,

more emphatically, by this point in the novel seeming realism is just that: it is the novel choosing to briefly adopt the *look* of realism as simply one of the many discursive modes it *represents* in its endless accumulation of signifying practices.

As apparent realism, however, the effect of the scene is to bestow on Mason an opportunity to rehearse again, in distinguished company, and with greater self-knowledge, the various impossible realms of quest he has explored in the novel. That as great a man as Johnson also reveals himself as similarly conflicted sanctions Mason's own yearnings. The conversation turns to what Johnson and Boswell may find in the Hebrides:

"The uncomplicated People, laboring with their primitive Tools," gushes Mason, "— the simplicity of Faith, lo, its Time reborn."

"'Tis fascinating, this belief among you Men of Science," remarks Dr. J., "that Time is ever more *simply* transcended, the further one is willing to journey away from London, to observe it."

"Why, Mason here's done the very thing," cries Boswell. "In America. Ask him."

Mason glowers, shaking his head. "I've ascended, descended, even condescended, and the List's not ended, — but haven't yet *transcended* a blessed thing, thankee."

"The Savages of America," intones the Doctor, "— what Powers do they possess, and how do they use them?" As if here, at the Edge of the World, they might confide what no one would ever say aloud in London, — with Boswell a-bustle to get it all scribb'l'd down into his Quarto.

The abruptness of the Doctor's Question reminds Mason of himself, addressing the Learned English Dog, a dozen years ago...his mouth creeps upward at the corners, almost achieving an Horizontal. "Would that my co-adjutor Mr. Dixon were here," says Mason (missing Dixon as he speaks) [...] (746)

The issue of Rebekah also inheres between the lines when, in response to Mason's religious doubts Johnson warns him that "the next step in such Petulance, is to define Him as some all-pervading Fairy-Dust, and style it Deism" (747). Mason responds:

"D'ye think I wasn't looking, all that long arse-breaking American time? Mounds, Caverns, things that went across the Sky? — had you seen one of those, 'twould've made y' think twice — Even giant Vegetables, — if it had to be, — seeking Salvation in the Oversiz'd, how pitiable, — what of it, I've little Pride, some great Squash upon the Trail-side? I'll take it, won't I."

"I'd've been happy with the Cock Lane Ghost," Johnson mutters.

"Happy," Mason nods. His eyes far too bright. "You were ill-treated, Sir, in that matter."

Mason is being gentlemanly here, referring to the gross characterisation of Johnson in Charles Churchill's satirical poem, "The Ghost," a digressive account of the Cock Lane debacle, where Johnson features as "Pomposo, — insolent and loud, / Vain idol of a scribbling crowd,"<sup>18</sup> a creature who is pretentious, overbearing, hideously ugly, corrupt, and who, in approaching with two others the tomb of the dead Miss Fanny in order to test the reality of her ghost, is terrified:

Our Quixotes (for that knight of old  
Was not in truth by half so bold;  
Though Reason at the same time cries,  
Our Quixotes are not half so wise,  
Since they, with other follies, boast  
An expedition 'gainst a Ghost)  
Through the dull, deep surrounding gloom,  
In close array, towards Fanny's tomb  
Adventured forth; Caution before,  
With heedful step, the lanthorn bore,  
Pointing at graves; and in the rear,  
Trembling, and talking loud, went Fear.<sup>19</sup>

Johnson *was* involved in the uncovering of the fraud, and Churchill's poem caused rumours of his credulity to spread: the suggestion in Johnson's muttering to Mason is that there may have been some fire beneath the smoke.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Churchill, Book II, lines 653-4.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* lines 693-710

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Boswell, in his *Life*, responds to the rumours, protesting perhaps too much: "Here it is proper, once for all, to give a true and fair statement of Johnson's way of thinking upon the question, whether departed spirits are ever permitted to appear in this world, or in any way to operate upon human life. He has been ignorantly misrepresented as weakly credulous upon that subject; and, therefore, though I feel an inclination to disdain and treat with silent contempt so foolish a notion concerning my illustrious friend, yet as I find it has gained ground, it is necessary to refute it. The real fact then is, that Johnson had a very philosophical mind, and such a rational respect for testimony, as to make him submit his understanding to what was authentically proved, though he could not comprehend why it was so. Being thus disposed, he was willing to inquire into the truth of any relation of supernatural agency, a general belief of which has prevailed in all nations and ages. But so far from being the dupe of implicit faith, that he examined the matter with a jealous attention,

Whatever the historical Johnson did or did not think, Mason here finds a comforting identification with a conflicted man to whose possible spiritual longings he can relate. At the same time, he is decent in his assurance to Johnson that he has been “ill-treated,” although the latter, again betraying himself, reacts with a rapier-flourish: “Be careful to note, Boswell, how even a Lunatick may yet be civil. Thank you, Sir. Or is it Your Holiness?”

### Mason’s Fate

Chapter seventy-six ends in a brief passage contrasting the fates of Mason and Maskelyne, with the narrator moving into the future simple tense, which, in its evocation of future time as known, foretold and manifest, manages to purvey a compelling sentimental air – bespeaking completion in the forever incomplete project of life.<sup>21</sup> In Scotland, Mason identifies the mountain, Schiehallion, as suitable for the gravitation work Maskelyne wishes to perform. We are told that,

’twill be Maskelyne who goes to Schiehallion, after Mason refuses the Assignment again, and becomes famous for it, not to mention beloved of the Scots people there, the subject of a Ballad, and presently a Figure of Legend, in a strange Wizard’s turnout bas’d upon an actual Observing Suit he will wear whilst in Perthshire. (748)

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and no man was more ready to refute its falsehood when he had discovered it.” Boswell, Vol. I, 406.

After thus defending Johnson’s intellectual honour, Boswell goes on to attack Churchill’s account. However, another reference, later in the *Life*, is further suggestive: “He expressed great indignation at the imposture of the Cock-lane Ghost, and related, with much satisfaction, how he had assisted in detecting the cheat, and had published an account of it in the news-papers. Upon this subject I incautiously offended him, by pressing him with too many questions, and he shewed his displeasure.” *ibid.* Vol. III, 268.

<sup>21</sup> In this respect we can recall the scene at Tyrone Slothrop’s hometown towards the end of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “The Occupation of Mingeborough,” perhaps one of Slothrop’s dying reveries, but with the suggestion of narrating foreknowledge that mingles the agents of representation in a manner similar to what I have found in *Mason & Dixon*: “An apple tree by the road is in blossom. The limbs are wet with this morning’s rain. Sitting under it, with anyone else but Slothrop, is a barelegged girl, blonde and brown as honey. Her name is Marjorie. [Slothrop’s brother] Hogan will come home from the Pacific and court her, but he’ll lose out to Pete Dufay. She and Dufay will have a daughter named Kim, and Kim will have her braids dipped in the school inkwells by young Hogan, Jr. It will all go on, occupation or not, with or without Uncle Tyrone” Pynchon, *GR* 744.

The details of this are likely untrue, but certainly Maskelyne became famous for the work, winning the Copley Medal for his calculation of the Earth's density. We recall of course that Mason's winning of the Copley could only happen in the reverie of chapter seventy-three.

In contrast to Maskelyne, Mason is drawn back into the non-transcendent human world, accepting his inability to advance professionally and politically in the service of the stars, tying him back into the mundane realm of family and community. I will quote the entire last paragraph:

Mason will go back to waking day after day in Sapperton, piecing together odd cash jobs for the Royal Society, reductions for Maskelyne's Almanack, — small children everywhere, a neat Observatory out in the Garden, a reputation in the Golden Valley as a Sorcerer, a Sorcerer's Apprentice, who once climb'd that strange eminence at Greenwich, up into another level of Power, sail'd to all parts of the Globe, but came back down among them again, — they will be easy with him, call him Charlie, at last. Another small-town eccentric absorb'd back into the Weavery, keeping a work-space fitted out someplace in the back of some long Cotswold house, down a chain of rooms back from the lane and out into the crooked Looming of those hillside fields.

### **Mason's Mate**

I will now turn to the friendship between Mason and Dixon, which is an important site for the novel's sentimental denouement. Again I will move between the "Last Transit" section, in this case chapters seventy-five and seventy-seven, and earlier parts of the novel, to articulate the ways in which this sentimental content is rendered. Chapter seventy-five begins with Mason's letter to Dixon, followed by the latter's reply. This mirrors the first interaction between the two, when in chapter two Dixon writes to Mason to introduce himself, and Mason replies. Their personalities are laid bare even here, with Dixon's letter self-effacing and flattering, although also revealing an uncanny and idiosyncratic use of language, as when he hopes that "what I lack in Celestial experience, I pray I may counterpend with Diligence and a

swift Grasp" (12).<sup>22</sup> Mason's letter attempts to be self-effacing, but reveals more that its author is self-obsessed. Reacting to Dixon's assurance that he will "adopt, as promptly benefit from, any suggestions" Mason may have, the latter's response is at once humble yet shot through with pride:

[...] I fear, the Doubts may with justice fall more upon your side, for I have never taught anyone, upon any Subject, nor may I prove much skill'd at it. Howbeit, — pray you hesitate not, in asking what you like, as I shall ever try to answer honestly, — if probably not *in toto*. (13)

Following this, Mason's attempt at jocularity — "none but the best for this Party, I should say!" — is undone by his "socially stumbling" attempt at reassurance, which merely gives away his obsessive regard for his own unrelenting anxieties:

[...] I wait your arrival in a Spirit happily rescu'd by your universally good Name, from all Imps of the Apprehensive, — an Exception most welcome, in the generally uneasy Life of

y'r obdt. Svt.,

Charles Mason

Separating these early letters is a brief proleptic discussion between the protagonists, which the narrator introduces as taking place "[a] few months later, when it is no longer necessary to pretend as much as they expected they'd have to" (12). This is a clear statement of the pleasant surprise each enjoys in the partnership: despite their innumerable differences, the two, as Dixon will tell Dolly, "get along," although he acknowledges that "[t]he Trick is all in stayin' out of each other's way, really" (300). The success of this unlikely match, however, is due more to Dixon than to Mason: perceiving the obscured decency in the latter, and genuinely sympathising with his emotional problems, Dixon is patient and gentle with Mason, although this is not always easy. As he goes on to explain to Dolly: "Ever been coop'd up with a Melancholick, for days on end? [...] I find it hard work to be cheery all the

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<sup>22</sup> "Counterpend," while its meaning is clear, is not to be found in any dictionary I have consulted.

time, — as cheery as it seems I must.” Dixon’s understanding, and its humanising effect on Mason, is the focus for my discussion here.

The opening scene in chapter three, where the two meet for the first time, is a comical passage of misunderstanding and unwitting antagonism. Mason, Assistant to the Astronomer Royal and with his pretensions yet intact, “finds himself coming the Old London Hand, before Dixon’s clear Stupefaction with that Town” (14). He encourages Dixon to join him on one of his sojourns out to Tyburn, which Dixon takes “for the joke it must surely be” (15), not understanding the extent of melancholy that afflicts his partner. Mason then contributes to the social discomfort by mocking Dixon’s accent, at which the latter begins to develop an insight: “Is it too many nights alone on top of that fam’d Hill in Greenwich? can this man, living in one of the great Cities of Christendom, not know how to behave around people?” Having “register[ed] [his] annoyance,” Dixon inspires a turnabout in Mason’s attitude, which causes even more discomfort and indicates to us Dixon’s growing antagonism but also his impulsive matiness:

“Oh, damme, I say, I didn’t mean, — ”

So Dixon for the second time in two minutes finds himself laughing without the Motrix of honest Mirth, — this time, a Mr. Mason-how-you-do-go-on laugh, sidewise and forbearing, the laugh of a hired Foil. Yet, feeling it his Duty to set them at Ease, he begins, “Well. There’s this Jesuit, this Corsican, and this Chinaman [...]” (15)

Dixon cannot finish his joke, however, before the paranoid Mason interrupts and the scene descends into comical farce:

Mason has been edging away. “Are you crazy?” he whispers, “ — People are staring. *Sailors* are staring.”

“Eeh!” Dixon’s nose throbbing redly. “You have heard it, then. Apologies,” reaching to clasp Mason’s arm, a gesture Mason retreats from in a Flinch as free of deliberation as a Sneeze. Dixon withdrawing, broken into a Sweat, “Why aye, it took me weeks of study to fathom that one, but I see You’ve a brisk Brain in Your gourd there, and I’m pleas’d to be working with such as it be...?” Resolutely a-beam, pronouncing the forms of *You* consciously, as if borrowing them from another Tongue. (16)

By now, just two pages into meeting the pair, their essential, and thoroughly contrasting characters are clear to the reader: Dixon, sociable, impulsive and an instinctive gentleman; Mason, socially awkward, insensitive and phobic about physical contact. This inauspicious beginning to their acquaintanceship, however, is moderated somewhat on the following page as Dixon, despite his “Background in Land-Surveying,” impresses Mason with his knowledge of astronomy. The latter, then,

[...] having expected some shambling wild Country Fool, remains amiably puzzl'd before the tidied Dixon here presented, — who, for his own part, having despite talk of Oddity expected but another overdress'd London climber, is amus'd at Mason's nearly invisible Turn-out, all in Snuffs and Buffs and Grays. (17)

As they venture out into the night, encountering Fang and the other mysterious nightfolk of Portsmouth, Dixon displays his sharp wit and ribaldry. When Mason wraps up a mutton chop as a gift for the dog, he justifies it thus:

[...] like, I don't know, perhaps a Bouquet sent to an Actress one admires, a nice Chop can never go too far off the Mark.”

Starting a beat late, “Why aye, 'tis a...a great World, for fair...? and Practices vary, and one Man certainly may not comment upon —”

“What...are you saying?”

Dixon ingenuously waving his Joint, eyes round as Pistoles. “No Offense, Sir.” Rolling his Eyes the Moment Mason switches his Stare away, then back a bit late to catch them so much as off-Center. (19)

At the same time, Dixon displays his capacity for insight and sympathy. Mason is off to meet the miraculous canine and has just delivered his line on Fang's “obvious bearing upon Metempsychosis.” Before we have had a word on the subject of Rebekah, Mason's new friend has an intimation of the subject, and his concern, even at this early stage, becomes apparent as the narrator gets close to his thoughts:

There is something else in progress, — something Mason cannot quite confide. Happen he's lost someone close? And recently enough to matter, aye, — for he's a way of pitching ever into the Hour, heedless, as Dixon remembers himself, after his father passed on.... “I'll come along, if I may...” (20)



## The Seahorse

The sea battle the protagonists are soon to find themselves involved in is a critical moment in sealing their friendship. We learn that:

Altho' Dixon is heading off to Sumatra with a member of the Church of England, — that is, the *Ancestor of Troubles*, — a stranger with whom he moreover but hours before was carousing *exactly like Sailors*, shameful to say, yet, erring upon the side of Conviviality, will he decide to follow Fox's Advice, and answer "that of God" in Mason, finding it soon enough with the Battle on all 'round them, when both face their equal chances of imminent Death. (38-9)

The horror of this episode is spread throughout chapter four, amongst other narrative information and told from different perspectives. It begins with a paragraph ambiguously attributed to Cherrycoke's consciousness, wondering "how had [...] daily devotions [...] ultimately ever been of use, how, in the snug Shambles of the *Seahorse*?" while, nonetheless, we are told, "[t]o the children, he remarks aloud, 'Of course, Prayer was what got us through.'" (30). There is then a digression within the frame and, when we return to the main narrative, we have more than five pages of background information on Captain Smith and his command. When the French ship appears, we return to the frame setting again, and the battle is related by Cherrycoke for the benefit of the children and from his point of view. The drama for Mason and Dixon, then, must be inferred more than it is told, with, after the above quote, only one paragraph of direct information about their experience:

Dissolution, Noise, and Fear. Below-decks, reduced to nerves, given in to the emprise of Forces invisible yet possessing great Weight and Speed, which contend in some Phantom realm they have had the bad luck to blunder into, the Astronomers abide, willing themselves blank yet active. Casualties begin to appear in the Sick Bay, the wounds inconceivable, from Oak-Splinters and Chain and Shrapnel, and as Blood creeps like Evening to Dominion over all Surfaces, so grows the Ease of giving in to Panic Fear. It takes an effort to act philosophickal, or even to find ways to be useful, — but a moment's re-focusing proves enough to show them each how at least to keep out of the way, and presently to save steps for the loblolly boy, or run messages to and from other parts of the ship. (39)

The importance of this experience for their mutual trust and regard, though, is adverted to retrospectively at the beginning of the following chapter:

In the crucial moments, neither Mason nor Dixon had fail'd the other. Each had met the other's Gaze for a slight moment before Duty again claim'd them, — the Vapors rising from the Wounds of dying Sailors smoothing out what was not essential for each to understand.

For the moment, they know they must stand as one, tho' not always how. (42)

Having finally resolved to write a letter of protest to Bradley, the two, now joined irrevocably, await their fate, smoking pipes "[i]n what each is surpriz'd to note for the first time as a companionable Silence." Yet at the same time,

[w]rapt tightly, as within Vacuum-Hemispheres, lies the Unspoken, — the concentration of Terror and death of but two afternoons ago, transpir'd without one word, in brute Contempt for any language but that of winds and masses, cries and blood. Impenetrable, it calls up Questions whose Awkwardness has only increas'd as the Astronomers have come to understand there may be no way of ever finding the Answers. (44)

And later, as they remember again, "what they cannot speak, some of it not yet, some of it never, resumes breathless Sovereignty in the wax-lit Rooms" (45). Immediately following this, we learn of how their protest to Bradley has been received, and the two become further joined, now in disgrace and (as they see it) preterition:

In swift reply comes a Letter of Reproach and Threat from the Royal Society. Someday Mason and Dixon may not dream as often of the Battle with the Frenchman, — but this Letter they will go back to again and again, unable to release it.

The battle was first referred to by Cherrycoke as early as page eleven, meaning its details unfold in snippets over some thirty-five pages, amid, all the while, much other, less dramatic and more entertaining, content. This, as we have seen, is a common feature of the novel: its "serious" themes are hidden strategically amongst its many lighter moments while remaining fundamental to our understanding of its emotional content. The narration, in this manner, pays its modernist debt, avoiding sentimental or melodramatic

tableaux, while still providing the groundwork for our cumulative sense of its humanist concerns. As I am attempting to illustrate here, these concerns eventually come together in the final section of the novel, where, having seen them avoid death on the *Seahorse* and in their journeys to the Cape, St. Helena and America, readers approach Mason and Dixon's inevitable mortality with a sentimental attention that the novel ineluctably brings into focus.

### Fragility

While at their first meeting Dixon was "pronouncing the forms of *You* consciously, as if borrowing them from another Tongue," at the beginning of chapter seventy-five we find Mason, approaching the gentlemanly at last, in his letter begging "leave to make ~~You~~ Thee a brief visit," and in this visit and his next we find him carefully pronouncing the Geordie forms of the pronoun.<sup>23</sup> This is tied up with his recognition that, suffering from gout, "[t]here is a fragility about Dixon now, a softer way of reflecting light, such that Mason must accordingly grow gentle with him. No child has yet summon'd from him such care" (734-5). What we have here, then, is a role-reversal from the majority of the novel, where it is generally Dixon whose patience and understanding mean that he is the one being gentle with Mason. I will briefly examine fleeting moments of that care and understanding that Dixon shows for his mate, before examining in more detail the way this comes into dialogue with Mason's belated reciprocal gestures in chapter seventy-five.

Late in the "America" section, Mason observes Dixon's capacity for gentleness when he speaks to the increasingly hysterical Captain Zhang "in a voice Mason has heard him use with pack-horses that the Killogh brothers, their Pack-Men, vouch are 'daft.'" (630). This captures Dixon's aptitude for empathy and ease with others, which is evident throughout the novel, and which has a particular history of its own: we learn, for example, during the

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<sup>23</sup> See especially pp 751-2.

return to England before the journey to America, that after his father's death Dixon would go out

[...] seeking men who'd been friends of his father's, seeking somehow to nod and smile them into remembering. Much of the Ale-borne Matiness others were to see in him was learn'd during this time, at great effort, a word, a Gesture at a Time. (242)

The contrast this bears out with the "socially stumbling" Mason can be seen in their respective encounters with the Sons of Liberty. Each passage is, naturally, fraught with tension, and both Mason and Dixon ultimately represent themselves well, but Dixon achieves this through the simplicity of sculling and praising American ale, and then buying a round for the truculent Blackie (569). Mason, on the other hand, is never at his ease with the Sons, and the dignity he takes from the situation depends, firstly, on his intellectual ability to extrapolate on the lessons he has learned from his own troubled history, and, secondly, on the way this speech reaches across history to address the modern reader. Having repaired their telescope (and thus aided the revolution), Mason takes his leave, and one of the Sons, Patsy, escorts him "past the Inconveniences of New-York":

Arriv'd at last in the Jerseys, Patsy claps him on the Shoulder. "We could be at War, in another Year. What a Thought, hey?"

"I do not enjoy regular Luncheon Engagements with these people, but I am close enough to tell you this, — they will not admit to Error. They rely upon colorful Madmen and hir'd Bullies to get them thro' the perilous places, and they blunder on. Beware them."

"Thank you, Sir. It must have cost you at least a few Years of believing otherwise, and I appreciate it. We all do." (408)

This is typical of the contrast between the two protagonists: the sincerity and insight of Mason is more impressive and profound, but the simplicity of Dixon's "Ale-borne Matiness" stands him in good stead in whatever difficult situation he finds himself, not least of which being his partnership with the moody and melancholic Mason.

Thus, at the Cape, still early in their friendship, when Mason is embroiled in the sexual machinations of the Vroom family and eventually

asks, “what am I supposed to do about it?” Dixon can offer him some simple, practical advice: “First, get out of thah’ House” (67). A little later, Dixon, who has been out adventuring in the town, with generosity (and possibly inward trepidation) invites Mason along: “I’d be much oblig’d if we might roam ‘round together, some Evening” (69). Still testing each other’s boundaries, this provides for a moment, wrapped within irony and wit, of inchoate emotional intimacy and growing mutual regard, which, in the simplicity yet sincerity of the prose, touches the reader at the sentimental suggestion of their feeling “identically.” Mason is speaking:

“I wish I knew where my Affection for you runs, — one moment ’tis sure as the heart-yarn of a Mainstay, the next I am entertaining cheerfully Projects in which your Dissolution is ever a Feature.”

“Calling off the Wedding, again. We must try not to weep...?” For an instant both feel, identically, too far from anyplace, defenseless behind this fragile Salient into an Unknown, too deep for one Life-Span, that begins directly behind Table Mountain. (70)

Immediately, though, the difficulty of being mates with Mason is drawn to our attention, and our respect for Dixon’s instinctive tolerance grows:

They do, to be sure, go out that Evening, as into various others together, in search of Lustful Adventure, but each time Mason will wreck things, scuttling hopes however sure, frightening off the Doxies with Gothickal chat of Headstones and Diseases of the Mind, swilling down great and occasionally, Dixon is told, exceptional Constantia wines with the sole purpose of getting drunk, exploding into ill-advis’d Song, losing consciousness face-first into a Variety of food and Drink, including more than one of the most exquisite *karis* this side of Sumatra, — that is, proving a difficult carousing partner, block’d from simple enjoyment in too many directions for Dixon to be at all anger’d, — rather marveling at him, as a Fair-goer might at some Curiosity of Nature.<sup>24</sup>

There is, however, a deepening bond between the two: as, above, they feel their isolation “identically,” so, when they decide on the following page to

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<sup>24</sup> This also brings to mind an exchange in *America* on the topic of women. Mason states: “You have to understand them, Dixon, they’ve this silent language, that only men of experience speak at all fluently,” to which Dixon replies: “Then why is it I’ve lost count of how many of my evenings tha’ve ruin’d, with thy talk of Cannibalism, or Suicide, or Bickering among the Whigs...? anything, but what ‘they’ wish to hear?” (441).

“share the *Data* of their Dreams whenever possible” an important feature of their relationship in the novel is articulated:

After those initiatory Hours together upon the *Seahorse*, having found no need to pretend a whole list of Pretenses, given thereby a windfall of precious time, neither is surpriz'd at how many attunements, including a few from dream-life, they may find between them. (71)

Three further minor but important moments from the novel will illustrate the forms of kindness and sympathy of which Dixon is capable. Bradley dies before the trip to America, and Mason, at home, on one occasion mentions Bradley's name, providing “an opening for someone at least to offer Condolences. None does” (201). By contrast, when they meet again in London, “Dixon, as soon as it is possible to do so [...] takes off his Hat. ‘I was sadden'd to hear of Dr. Bradley's Death, Sir’” (246). Later, in America, we are given this insight into Dixon's pragmatic sociability:

If Mason's elaborate Tales are a way for him to be true to the sorrows of his own history (the Rev<sup>d</sup> Cherrycoke presently resumes), a way of keeping them safe, and never betraying them, in particular those belonging to Rebekah, — then Dixon's Tales, the Emersoniana, the ghosts of Raby, seem to arise from simple practical matiness. Who, if not Mason, at any given moment, needs cheering? A cheerful Party-Chief means a cheerful Party. (316-7)

And later still, we witness this scene with the vaguely unpleasant Captain Shelby, whom Dixon, in particular, seems to find distasteful:

The night before they set out westward again, Captain Shelby, from behind a can of his own Ale, brewed in the Shed adjoining, his face compos'd, inquires of them, Where is the Third Surveyor?

Mason, mistrustful, looks about as if this Newcomer might be at hand. Dixon, understanding Shelby to be posing a Riddle, is pull'd between loyalty to Mason and despair at his slowness in these matters. “Pray, Captain,” he feels oblig'd to play in, “what Third Surveyor is that, for we are but two.”

“Why,” chuckles Shelby, “you are Wise Men from the East, — and ev'ryone knows they come in Threes!”

“Eeh, eeh! That's a canny one, for fair!” (604)

## The Meat-Ship

Back in chapter seventy-five, Mason and Dixon find that “talk will ever drift to their separate Transits” (735), and Mason tells Dixon his amusing tale of

getting caught in the hold of a meat-ship, “a careless Innocent at some Ball of the Dead, among a sliding, thick meat Battery,” but he fails to note the second level of humour in the situation until he explains his rescue and Dixon interprets it for him:

“Fortunately, just then, a Party of Sailors, who for some reason were neither on Watch nor asleep, seeming indeed almost furtive in Demeanor, rescu’d me. I noted too a puzzling air of Jollification, some of it directed at me. ‘How is it in there?’ one of them ask’d, with what, upon Shore, would certainly’ve been taken as an insinuating Leer. Not ‘How *was* it,’ – which is odd enough, no, what this Sailor distinctly said –”

“Why aye, Mason, tha see it, don’t tha ...? they *were* Sailors...? ‘Tis probably a standard practice, upon those Meat-Voyages...? Something a foremast Swab, in his Day’s unrelenting bleakness, might have to look forward to, when the Midnight Hour creeps ‘round...?”

“What. – Do you mean, – Oh, Dixon, really.”

Dixon shrugs. “If a Lad were wide awake, kept his wits about him, why the pitch of Danger...? eeh, eeh! at thah’ speed, thah’ lack of Friction...? and one’s Mates in there as well, – might be just the Thing, – ” (736)

This reminds us of Dixon’s wit and worldliness, which contrasts with Mason’s relative innocence throughout the novel and provides for many an entertaining situation, as when in chapter three Dixon perceives that the “ancient” Hepsie is in fact “a shockingly young Woman hard at work, – with whom, country Lout that he is, he can’t keep from flirting” (26).

At the Cape, while Mason is embroiled in sexual intrigue, “’tis the Slavery, not any form of Desire, that is of the essence. Dixon, out of these particular meshes, can see it, – Mason cannot” (68). Out of these meshes, Dixon is seeking adventure and stimulation in “the prohibited parts of town” (77), “acquiring a nasal map of the Town” (78) and “feel[ing] like a predatory Animal, – as if this Town were ancient to him, his Hunting-Ground.” This passage, describing Dixon’s excursions into “the state of Outlaw,” is followed by an exchange with Mason, who is busily attempting to manage the competing attentions of the incorrigible Vroom girls, Jet and Greet. The exchange captures the two men’s different realities, their sometimes volatile disagreements, as well as Dixon’s sense of humour and Mason’s lack thereof:

Yet 'tis difficult, if not impossible, for these Astronomers to get down to a Chat upon the Topick of Desire, given Dixon's inability to deny or divert the Gusts that sweep him, and Mason's frequent failure, in his Melancholy, even to recognize Desire, let alone to act upon it, tho' it run up calling Ahoy Charlie. "How could you begin to understand?" Mason sighs. "You've no concept of Temptation. You came ashore here *looking* for occasions to transgress. Some of us have more Backbone, I suppose...."

"A bodily Part too often undistinguish'd," Dixon replies, "from a Ram-Rod up the Arse."

Jet slides by in the narrow Hallway. "Don't forget to-night, Charles," she sings.

"I'll remember," mutters Mason, adjusting his Wig.

Dixon beams after her, then back at Mason. "Engaging Youngster...?"

"She is a fine young Woman, Dixon, and I shan't hear a Word more."

"Tell me," blinks Dixon, "what'd I say?" But Mason has already clamber'd away up the Stairs. Passing thro' the Hallway a bit later, Dixon observes Mason now in deep conversation with Greet, the two of them nervous as cats. "Mutton again this evening, I'm told," Dixon cries in cheery Salute. The Girl shrieks, and runs off into the Kitchen.

Mason snarls. "Time hanging heavy, 's that it? What can I do to help? Just name it."

"Why aye, — perhaps when the Ladies have retir'd, — " Thus bickering they pass into the Dining-Room. (78-9)

Later, when Dixon returns alone to the Cape, after a night observing the sexual slavery of the Company Lodge (149-54), he reflects on the malignant and ubiquitous corruption of the place, which he finds articulated in the lives, manners and dreams of the Vroom girls. He is seen here, in a passage that is at once beautiful, awful and true, to intuit Mason's attraction to morbidity and moral collapse:

What enchanted Mason about these Girls, Dixon comes to realize, with some consternation, is their readiness to seek the Shadow, avoid the light, believe in what haunts these shores exactly to the Atom, — ghosts ev'rywhere, — Slaves, Hottentots driven into exile, animals remorselessly Savage, — a Reservoir of Sin, whose Weight, like that of the atmosphere, is borne day after day unnotic'd, adverted to only when some Vacuum is encounter'd, — a Stranger in Town, a Malay publicly distraught, an hour at the Lodge, — into which its Contents might rush with a Turbulence felt and wonder'd at by all. The Vroom Girls and their counterparts all over town are Daughters of the End of the World, smiling more than they ought, chirping when needful, alert to each instant of the long Day as likely as the next to hold a chance of Ruin. In their Dreams they ever return to Prisons of Stone, to Gates with Seals 'tis Death to break, the odor of soap and Slops, the Stillness of certain Corridors, the unchallengeable Love of a Tyrant, Yellow Light from unseen Watch-Fires flickering upon the Wall, and unexpectedly, rounding a particular Corner, to the tall Clock from Home, ringing the Quarter-Hour. (155)



A page later, Greet takes Dixon aside and attempts to ensnare him in the kind of lustful traps that Mason so willingly walked into. Here we see Dixon's assured and pragmatic ability to steer clear of such embroilment, the power of his easily adopted mask of ingenuousness, as well as his understanding of, but respect for, the less socially gifted Mason:

"The Transit's run, Lass, all that remains is to find the Going of the Clock, and, — eeh, — why Greet, the very idea."

"They all know I'm in here with you." She seizes the two sides of her Bodice and tears it apart. A young Bosom appears, pale and pink. "Did you just do that? Shall I call out that you did? Or was it a Spontaneous Seam Separation, apt to happen to any Bodice, really?"

"Thou did it, Lass."

"They won't believe that."

"So they may say. But they know thee."

"Brutal Albion, you are making it difficult for me to love you." She presses together a few hidden Snaps, and the Bodice is once again complete. "Mr. Mason was never so cold."

"Mason is naturally affectionate. Tho' he appears not to know one end of a Woman from another, yet 'tis all he thinks about, when he has a moment to think. (156)

## Touching Moments

The first deeply affecting moment of sympathy that Dixon shows for Mason is when the latter tells of Rebekah's visits at St. Helena. These take place while Dixon is still at the Cape, and Mason concludes that "[t]elling Maskelyne is out of the question" (165). We are privy to a proleptic passage, however, when we learn that "when at last Dixon does come up the Sea-Steps at James's Town, Mason will seize his Arm and whisk him off to his local, The Ruin'd Officer, to tell him as soon as he can." Ready to be disbelieved, yet compelled to communicate with Dixon, he continues, "[s]tubborn, heat in his face, 'Damme, she was here'," and goes on to confirm, "'[i]n truth, I have ever waited meeting her again.' Nodding as if to confirm it." We are then given access to Mason's thoughts, giving a sense of the extent of his dwelling on the subject and an insight into the depth of his feeling:

He continues, tho' not aloud, — There is a Countryside in my Thoughts, populated with agreeable Company, mapped with Romantick scenery, Standing-Stones and broken Archways, cedar and Yew, shaded Streams, and

meadows a-riot with wild-flowers, — holding therein assemblies and frolicks...and each time, somewhere by surprize goes Rebekah, ever at a distance, but damme 'tis she, and a moment passes in which we have each recognized the other, — my breath goes away, I turn to Marble, —

The power of this passage lies in its rendering by the narrator of Mason's reverie in a kind of interior monologue that articulates in his voice how he might phrase the image he entertains if he could or was inclined to. Here we witness an example of the freedoms the narrator has carved out for himself in the novel. I call this "interior monologue" because it is closer to that mode than it is to, say, free indirect discourse, but in reality it points to the ontological difference between a fleeting mental image, which is all Mason entertains, and its imaginary rendering *as prose, in Mason's voice, by the narrator*. The effect is powerful, and it brings the reader to an emotional empathy with Mason's feelings that is on a par with the empathy Dixon is brought to by the expressions and gestures of his friend, none of which we, the readers, can see. This is important for our reading Mason's next spoken line with a degree of feeling that Dixon, present on the scene, also experiences: "Oh, Dixon. I am afraid."

We have already noted Mason's phobia about physical contact, which informs the emotional content of the exchange that follows:

Dixon, carefully, keeping back as far as he can get, stretches an arm and places his hand on Mason's shoulder.

Mason's feet remain tranquil. "Then," he is smiling to himself at the foolishness of this, of ev'rything, "what shall I do?"

"Why, get on with it," replies Dixon.

"Easy advice to give, — how often I've done it..."

"Even easier to take, Friend, — for there's no alternative." (165-6)

To this Mason reacts with muddled anger, reflecting as it does all the advice he as received to "move on." He attacks Dixon for his "sage answer," and goes on:

"...Tell me, then, — what if I can't just lightly let her drop? What if I won't just leave her to the Weather, and Forgetfulness? What if I want to spend, even squander, my precious time trying to make it up to her? Somehow? Do you think anyone can simply let that all go?"

Empathic and patient, in responding to this Dixon sees the folly of attempting to convince Mason, and by alerting us to this decision the narrator evokes the moral tension of the situation and demonstrates Dixon's insight into the potential efficacy of narrative therapy: "'Thou must,' Dixon does not say. Instead, tilting his wine-glass at Mason as if 'twere a leaden Ale-Can, he beams sympathetically. 'Then tha must break thy Silence, and tell me somewhat of her.'" This takes us to the end of chapter fifteen; the next begins with Mason's story of the Randwick cheese rolling.

Another (this time non-touching) "touching moment" comes when, to Mason's great disappointment, Maskelyne is appointed Royal Astronomer. Dixon has already noted of Maskelyne that for him, "*Right Ascension* may require a Wrong or two" (124), so he is less surprised at the news than his friend. Mason attempts initially to feign indifference: "Actually, I'm quite reliev'd. Didn't need that on my Mind, did I?" (436) However, the narrator notes on Dixon's behalf that "Mason attempting to be chirpy is less easy to bear than Mason in blackest Melancholy." At Dixon's questioning, however, the extent of Mason's disgust (and envy) is expressed, leaving the endlessly sympathetic Dixon an opportunity to once again show his understanding of this man, and his capacity to lighten the mood with his humour. Mason is railing against Maskelyne:

"[...] Few are his ideas, Lunarian is his one Faith, to plod is his entire Project. He will never make any discovery on the order of Aberration, nor Nutation, — he is unworthy, damn him! to succeed James Bradley." His face is wet, more with Spittle than Tears.

"Eeh, Mason." Dixon by now has learn'd to stay at a respectful distance, and not to rely too heavily upon Touch as a way of communicating. "You believ'd... Really...?"

"Oh well, 'really,' — it's like a Woman, isn't it, you look at each other, you think Of course not, she thinks Of course not, — yet the Alternatives hang about, don't they, like Wraiths."

"Eehh, City Matters, would I knoah anything about thah'?" (437)

Dixon attempts to get Mason to see that, as well as being "Clive of fucking India's, fucking, Brother-in-law," Maskelyne is also a Cambridge graduate, but Mason objects while Dixon retains his good humour:

"The last three A.R.'s were all Oxford men."

"There's a difference?"

Mason stares, then says slowly, "Yes, Dixon, there is a difference.... *And* he went in as a bloody Sizar<sup>25</sup>, I could have done *that*, — don't you think I was 'one of their own'? What, then, the Bastard Son? The faithful old Drudge in the Background? Haven't I any standing in this? Is that what this fucking exile in America's about then, Morton and his fucking Royal Society, — to get me out of the way so that Maskelyne can go prancing up to Greenwich freed of opposition, — "

"So, Ah'm dragg'd along in the wake of your ill fortune, eeh, another bonny mess...?" (437-8)

The emotional investment Mason has here does not, of course, approach that of the above passage relating to Rebekah, and Dixon is frustrated by what he perceives as evidence of Mason's unworldliness. He nonetheless, out of loyalty, feels compelled to disabuse Mason of his delusions:

Though reaching the outskirts of Forbearance, can he really continue? Yes, he ought to. Either Mason cannot admit there's a Class problem here, or, even this deeply compromised, he may yet somehow keep Faith that in the Service of the Heavens, dramatic Elevations of Earthly Position are to be expected of these Times, this Reign of Reason, by any reasonable man. Very well, "Mason, you are a Miller's Son. That can never satisfy them."

He also manages, as we can see above, to provide some comic relief to the scene and Mason's hopelessness. For one who sees the situation as clearly as Dixon does, it is difficult for him to genuinely empathise with Mason, but he continues valiantly, offering at the chapter's close some trite but hopeful advice with a lightness of tone that affects Mason and restores him to something approaching equanimity:

"Were I thee, I should make him feel guilty ev'ry chance I got. Perhaps he doubts his own Worthiness. Tha must never make it too obvious, of course, always the dignified Sufferer, — yet there is no predicting what Advantage tha may build, upon his Uncertainty."

"Why bless me, Sir, — you are a Jesuit, after all. Sinister Alfonso, move aside, — sheathe that Stiletto, wicked Giuseppe, — here is the true Italian Art."

"I-o? Why, I am simple as a pony, Sir... ? — born in a Drift, a Corf for my cradle, and nought but the Back-shift for Schoolmasters there..." (439)

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<sup>25</sup> A scholarship student.

## Bickering Lovers

The examples above demonstrate the extent of Mason and Dixon's mutual regard, but at the same time Dixon's tolerance is forever a shadow's edge from being the victim of Mason's vituperative wit. Even at harmonious moments, the precariousness of their relations is evident, which we have already seen in the above passage about "temptation." A further telling example is when Mason is recounting the weavers' strike in Stroud, and allows himself to confide an important reason for his interest in the subject, leading to Dixon's similar revelation, and a moment where the two enjoy this discovery of a mutual interest in social justice. Mason has just been describing the lot of the common weaver in 1756:

He pauses as if reaching a small decision. "Rebekah's people were weavers."

Dixon lighting his Pipe, "Hahdn't knoawn thah'."

"Wool-workers upon her father's side, silk upon her mother's, — she liked to say it accompted for the way she was."

Dixon puffs, nodding slowly, evenly, eyes cross'd as if scrying in the glow of his pipe-bowl.

"And that wondrous night, in the High Street, they were all there, brothers and cousins and uncles," — Mason's pause seems but for breath, tho' Dixon already is beaming an unmistakable inquiry, — "I was there, now that I think of it."

Dixon nods. "Been out upon the Pavement m'self...Tyne Keelmen, back in 'fifty. No business over there, understand, none at all, yet..."

Mason reaches for his Pipe. "Oh, aye."

"More than once, perhaps...?"

"I have look'd on Worlds far distant, their Beauty how pitiless."

"Yet thah' night — "

"The Streets, Jere! thousands of angry men in Streets that ordinarily see no more than, oh, a dozen a day, — 'twas back'd up to Slad Brook! it spill'd out into both branches of the High Street, — " he puffs, in a sub-merriment Dixon recognizes [...] (502)

Despite the good humour here, when Dixon admits that the keelmen were transported to America and suggests that "[i]f we'd stopp'd longer in Philadelphia, we'd've run into a few of 'em by now," Mason wonders, "would I've enjoy'd that?" (503), to which Dixon, speaking before thinking, responds honestly: "Tha might not've been along..." This leads to a debate

over the relative worth of keelmen and weavers, leading to this exchange and a typical use of Mason's ever-poised sharp tongue:

"You've nothing in Gloucester nay, nor in the Kingdom, to match the night Billy Snowball thought the Old Clasher's head was an Ale-Can! Eeh! Eeh! Eeh!"

Mason gazes until the laughter subsides. "Tho' evidently a source of Cheery Memories for you, — "

The novel abounds in Mason's often nasty wit, and we are constantly reminded of the pair's bickering, but one of the best extended examples of their occasional, and often comic, bitterness is found when they are staying at the home of Thomas Cresap, the "old renegade," and generalised moral confusion is beginning to hang heavy over the protagonists. They ask Cresap's advice regarding the Native Americans who will be joining them, and he tells them that if these visitors ask the "fatal" question — "[w]hy are you doing this?" — their "only hope is not to react" (641). At this:

"Why *am* I doing this?" Mason inquires aloud of no one in particular, " — Damme, that is an intriguing Question. I mean, I suppose I could say it's for the Money, or to Advance our Knowledge of, — "

"Eeh, — regard thaself, thou're *reacting*," says Dixon. "Just what Friend Cresap here said not to do, — thou're doing it...?"

"Whine not, as the Stoick ever says? You might yourself advert to it profitably, — "

"What Crime am I charg'd with now, ever for Thoo, how convenient?"

"Wait, wait, you're saying I don't take blame when I should, that I'm ever pushing it off onto you?"

"Wasn't I that said it," Dixon's Eyebrows headed skyward, nostrils a-flare with some last twinkling of Geniality.

"I take the blame when it's my fault," cries Mason, "but it's never my Fault, — and *that's* not my Fault, either! Or to put it another way, — "

"Aye, tell the Pit-Pony too, why don't tha?"

"Children, children," admonishes the Patriarch, "let us be civil, here. Am I not a Justice of the Peace, after all? Now, — which is the Husband?"

This is greeted by rude Mirth, including, presently, Dixon's, though not even a chuckle from Mason, who can only, at best, stop glowering. This is taken as high Hilarity, and the "Corn" continues to pass 'round, which Mason is oblig'd to drink, — the unglaz'd Rim unwipably wet from the loose-lipp'd Embraces of Mouths that may recently have been anywhere, not excluding, — from the look of the Company, — live elements of the Animal Kingdom. (642)

Following this scene, Mason approaches Snake, a Norfolk terrier, enquiring after news of Fang. He gets nothing, but with Dixon's mocking of Mason's "poor small Hopes how relentless" (644) we *are* told that "Snake recognizes between these two a mark'd degree of Acidity. They walk away now, gesturing and shouting at each other" (645). However, immediately we get a scene of harmony between the two, with Dixon again displaying his capacity for insight and understanding of Mason's widower longings. This is the final moment before chapter sixty-seven, where "they are join'd by a Delegation of Indians" (646), in the early moments, then, of the third mood of the "America" section, where rollicking absurdity gives way to fear, confusion and doubt. There is an intimation of what is to come, then, when Dixon tells Mason that "something is out there, that may not happen till we arrive," and he continues:

"I know what tha wish to happen, what tha hope to find. 'Twould be the only thing that could've brought thee to America."

"And you say you think you can feel...?"

"Don't know what it is. Herd of Buffalo as easily as Light from Elsewhere, — something of about that Impact."

"You promise, — you're not just trying to be encouraging, in that cheery way you put on and off like a Wig...?"

"I wouldn't joak about thah'...? Not with thee...? With young Hickman perhaps, or Tom Hynes, —

"Who are, — what? twelve? ten? They think they'll live forever, of course you can all joak about it." (645)

The chapter ends with a young lad, "seven or eight or thereabouts" playing a joke on the pair with "an unopen'd Goober Pea-Shell," leaving them "astonish'd, for a moment look[ing] like a match'd pair of Goobers themselves." It is this twinship, constantly tested yet also affirmed, that will get the pair through the anxious and disappointing pages to come.

### **From the Meat-Ship to the Inner Earth**

In the context of what I have been discussing above — from the use of pronouns (and we can add to this the Quaker "Friend"), to the use of touch, to the one-way sympathy of the Mason/Dixon relationship, to Mason's

perennial bad temper – the denouement of Mason's story of the meat ship in chapter seventy-five is of particular sentimental import in terms of the role-reversal that we have witnessed in this chapter. Referring to Dixon's theory on the nocturnal diversions of the sailors on board the ship, Mason concedes that "it never occur'd to me. Too late to do anything about it," to which Dixon replies:

"Pity...? Tha might've had a bit of Fun in there, at least...?"  
 "Aahhrr.... With its Corollary, that whatever I do imagine as Fun, invariably produces Misery...."  
 "Not only for thee," adds Dixon, pretending to scrutinize the Fire, "but for ev'ry Unfortunate within thy Ambit, as well."  
 "Gave thee a rough time, didn't I, Friend." Reaching to rest his hand for a moment upon Dixon's Shoulder, before removing it again.  
 "Oh," Dixon nodding away at an Angle from any direct view of his Partner's Face, "as rough times go,...the French were worse...? Then five Years of Mosquitoes, of course...." The old Astronomers sit for a while in what might be an Embrace, but that they forbear to touch. (737)

This sentimental tableau, born of Mason's endeavour to show towards his friend the kind of care that he once received from the latter, is given a further echo when Dixon comes to tell of his trip to the North Cape. There is "Apprehension in his Face" as Mason surmises where Dixon's story of being "[t]aken, then, – yet further North" is heading. This tale of Dixon's visit to the inner Earth, indeed, recalls his earlier professed belief in this myth, which, when he expresses it while they are still in America, receives Mason's contemptuous scorn:

"Grant me Patience O Lord," Mason with a bleak Expression, holding his head. "When 'tis not the Eleven Days missing from the New Style, or the Cock Lane Ghost, yet abides the Hollow Earth, as a proven Lure and Sanctuary to all, that too lightly bestow their Faith."  
 "Why," snorts Dixon, "half of all the Philosophers in Durham are Hollow-Earthers."  
 "That accounts for Emerson," hisses Mason. "Who was the other, again?" (603)

As the ailing Dixon describes his journey to the inner Earth, however, in chapter seventy-five, he receives only a "patiently challenging smile," and in his efforts to remain forgivingly receptive, "Mason sits rhythmically



inserting into his Face an assortment of Meg Bland's Cookies, Tarts, and Muffins,...pretending to be silent by choice, lest any phrase emerge too farinaceously inflected," while "Dixon continues cheerfully" (739).

While Mason does his best to keep his thoughts to himself here, Dixon's narrative also displays an ability to appeal to his scientific interests and spiritual quests. Back in America, Mason had protested to Dixon thus:

'Dixon,— pray you. Think. If Newton's figure is correct,— if the density of the Earth, on average, is between five and six times that of water, then the shell of this Hollow Earth of yours [...] would have to possess some quite impossibly high density'.

In fact, Newton's density of the Earth is not the critical issue here; his estimate of the density of the moon, however, is. This estimate, described by N. Kollerstrom as "[a]rguably the most significant error in the Principia's Book III,"<sup>26</sup> suggested that the relative densities of the Moon to Earth were nine to five, meaning the Moon was nearly twice as dense as the Earth. Newton's great admirer, Edmund Halley, accepted this figure and deduced the possibility that the Earth could, therefore, have a hollow interior. He invoked this in his 1692 paper, "An account of the cause of the change of the variation of the magnetical needle with an hypothesis of the structure of the internal parts of the Earth," where he explained the secular change in declination (the slight variation in the direction of magnetic north that occurs to different extents in different places over time) as the result of a second sphere inside the Earth, lying on the same rotational axis but revolving at a slower rate, causing a westward drift of this second, interior, pair of magnetic poles — these, of course, like the exterior magnetic poles, lying at a certain remove from the axial poles of both spheres.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kollerstrom.

<sup>27</sup> This has already been referred to in the novel, when the mysterious Dolly explains to Dixon "the latest Declination Figures" and he postulates "[s]omething underground, moving Wesward," to which she responds: "Hush. No one ever speaks of that aloud here" (299). Later Dolly admits that as a girl, with her first compass, she understood "that it did not always point North...and it was the Dips and Deflexions I grew most curious about" (301).

Thus, there is a clear reference to Halley's theory when the inner-Earthers tell Dixon that "You receive Messages from us, by way of your Magnetic Compasses. What you call the 'Secular Change of Declination' is whatever dimm'd and muffl'd remnant may reach you above, of all the lives of us Below" (740). This is a jest directed more to the modern reader than to Mason, calling attention to the contingencies of our conceptions and "world-views" over time, but the remainder of the speech is particularly resonant for Mason in its recollection of what Rebekah told him so long ago on St. Helena, to "[l]ook to the Earth" for "Tellurick Secrets." Dixon, then, is told by the inner-Earthers that they "have learn'd to use the Tellurick Forces, including that of Magnetism, — which you oddly seem to consider the only one." To which: "'There are others?' Mason perking up."

The half page of the narrative prior to this has been told *sans* Dixon's voice, overtaken, that is, by the main narrator. At Mason's growing interest, though, as the story refers him to his own obsessions, his scepticism falls away and he takes a renewed interest as Dixon's story-telling voice returns, explaining, in a further nod to the modern reader and our awareness of how knowledge creates our imaginary realities, that Mason's trip to Scotland is of moment to the inner-Earthers because, as they explain, "[o]nce the solar parallax is known, once the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last, all this will vanish. We will have to seek another Space" (741). Towards its end, Dixon's narrative is lent a certain implicit reality-status as it dissolves into a conversation between the two interlocutors, maintaining the ontology of the hollow Earth as an acknowledged reality, with Mason reacting to, and joking about, aspects of what Dixon tells him (741-2). In other words, while on one level the story is for modern readers a parable about the role of science as shaped by as well as shaping the contingencies of belief, at the same time it is also another gesture towards the power of narrative, in that it oversees Mason's transition from patient disbeliever to involved participant. Because of our increasingly distinguishable roles here, the two different audiences, Mason and the reader,

likewise become distinct in their approaches to the story: the former becomes increasingly involved, establishing a yet deeper sentimental bond with Dixon; while the latter becomes removed from involvement in the story, reading it as a parable and observing from an approving distance Mason's transformation.

### **Attitudes and Departures (I)**

Mason's new-found care for his ailing friend is brought into focus in the sentimental scene of parting that closes this chapter, which evokes as well the importance of tactility, which I have been discussing, and sees Mason again employing the Quaker term, "Friend." Agreeing that they "must count upon becoming old Geezers together," the two "are looking directly at one another for the first time since either can remember" (742). Upon Dixon's refusal of an offer to visit Mason in Sapperton, due to his failing health, he reaches "out his hand to Mason's arm, lest Mason, in his way, take too much offense":

Mason, as he long has learn'd to for Dixon, refrains from flinching. "No loss, perhaps, — thanks to the damn'd Clothiers, no one can guarantee what, if anything, swims in the Frome anymore," avoiding any prolong'd talk of Frailty, which he can see is costing Dixon more than his reserve of cheer may afford. [...] He turns to the Straps securing the Transit Instruments, ignoring what is just behind his Eyes and Nose. "Mind thyself, Friend." (743)

This chapter gives us clear understanding of Mason's "progress beyond the socially stumbling Philosopher-Fool he began as," coming to value his and others' humanity above his own metaphysical and scientific quests for transcendent meaning. It also reveals that his "Pursuit of the Gentlemanly" is finally taking on the shape of authenticity; instead of pursuing it for its, or his, own ends, it has become a sentimental act of indulgence in the other, a reaching towards empathic relations in the human world. This also brings the reader to a sentimental focus on the two men and their friendship, which they, and we, come to understand and value as their bodies begin to fail and death appears on their horizons. While Dixon's dual-voiced narrative provided the formal mechanism for readers to step back from and observe the growing intimacy between the two protagonists, the

final scene returns to a simple moment of realism, which draws readers sentimentally into an intimacy with the fictional moment and its abiding sense of loss—the protagonists' impending loss of each other and our estrangement from this reality, inhering, as it does, in text and representation.

### **A Night-Time City**

I have already discussed the dignifying realism of Mason's encounter with Dr. Johnson in chapter seventy-six, following the above scenes with Dixon.

Chapter seventy-seven sees Mason's final visit with Dixon, and we are immediately told of "the deterioration the Year intervening has brought to each" (749). The sentimental significance of this chapter lies in its increasing focus on death, its contextualising of Dixon's life, and its rounding out of the Mason/Dixon friendship with the reappearance of Fang, which brings to the surface a metonymic sense of the manifold of diverse worlds that coexist within the signifying structures that encase the reader's experience of the novel. It is important to note that the novel does not offer an absolutely redemptive vision, which would sanction the kind of transcendence that it implicitly denies. Rather, the sentiment of these final chapters is situated around the tension inherent in the impossibility of such transcendence and the uncomfortable acceptance of the necessity of incompleteness and loss. Progress, hope and humanist vision are all unavoidably inscribed within teleological absence, undermining hope and relativising vision.

Thus, despite Mason's progress, which I have been discussing, this is in tandem, we learn, with his "slow retreat, his steps taken backward, only just stubborn enough to keep facing the light, into Melancholy." "[F]acing the light," then, is a humanist act of defiance against the impossibility of satisfied hopes, a hopeless yet morally significant act. This partial image of redemption, shot through with the sentiment of failed arrival and incompleteness, means the reader's experience parallels Mason's: whatever his progress, he remains afflicted by the melancholy of loss, which will come into further focus when I discuss the final chapter of the novel. At this point

Mason's melancholy, and his concomitant willed refusal of death, are articulated in his "dream of a night-time City, — of creeping among monuments of stone perhaps twice his height, of seeking refuge from some absolute pitiless Upheaval in relations among Men." This springs, we are told, from "watching America [...] in its great Convulsion," but the city is also "Stonehenge, absent 'Bekah and Moon-Light." This dream city, then, is an amalgam of images from Mason's life, surrounding psychologically whatever he has sought, lost and learnt.

Not only is Stonehenge associated with the happy memories of Rebekah that I have discussed, but it is also for Mason a symbol of ancient astronomy, the site of both promise and failure in his secular life. The two come together in the "Standing-Stones and broken Archways" (165) of his private vision of meeting Rebekah, and the dream also relates to what Dixon identified as "what tha wish to happen, what tha hope to find" (645). That is, we recall Mason's admission to Dr. Johnson of what he was looking for "all that long arse-breaking American time" (747): "Mounds, Caverns [...] Even giant Vegetables." These are clear references to moments throughout the "America" section where Mason and Dixon encounter these "Tellurick" phenomena. The cave they are shown by Mr Shockey inspires the passage taken from the actual journal of Mason and Dixon, where Mason describes it as "Striking its Visitants with a strong and melancholy reflection: that such is the abodes of the Dead: thy inevitable doom, O stranger [...]" (497).<sup>28</sup> There are references here to "ancient Inscriptions, Glyphs unreadable," and the ancient "Welsh Indians" of Shelby's obsession, and Mason "is seiz'd by Monology. 'Text, — ' he cries, and more than once, 'it is Text, — and we its readers [...].'"

Later, Shelby takes Mason and Dixon to the giant mound and tells them that "Indians speak of a race of Giants, who built them" (595). Dixon claims that the layers of midden in the mound, which Mason denigrates for

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<sup>28</sup> See also Mason 16.

not being “Philosophickal Materials,” represent “a Sign of the intention to Accumulate Force, — not necessarily Electrical, neither [...] Forces more Tellurick in nature, more attun’d, that is, to Death and the slower Phenomena” (599). Following this, Shelby takes them to “the Ruin of a Wall,” which features inscriptions he interprets as Ogham. When they enter “the Country of the Old Forts” (662), they find “Rocks with lines of Glyphs inscrib’d on them. Nobody can read them, but all believe they are Grave Markers.” They are told by the Native Americans that “the Forts were built and later abandon’d by a Nation of Giants,” leading to this exchange, where, for Mason, an accumulation of associations comes into focus:

Within the broken Perimeters lie Monoliths that once stood on end, — recumbent, the Indians believe, “ — they are dead or sleeping, — upright, they live, — likenesses neither of Gods, nor of men, — but of Guardians....”

“Guardians, — of...?”

“Helpers. They live. They have Powers.”

“In England, you see,” Mason feels impell’d to instruct the Indians, “They mark the positions of Sun, Moon, some say Planets, thro’ the Year.... They are tall, like Men, for the same reason our Sector is Tall, — in order to mark more closely these movements in the Sky.”

Furthermore, recalling Mason’s comment to Dr. Johnson, we can note that this scene comes just six pages after the encounter with the giant vegetables, where Mason and Dixon are told that “[w]e but look after these, for Others who are absent, pending their Return” (656).

There is, then, an accumulation of ideas in Mason’s mind associating Stonehenge with Rebekah, with astronomy, and with his search for spiritual revelation in America, where caves, stones and monuments are inscribed, speak of ancient peoples and knowledge, and where there is an abiding sense of guardianship and return. In the melancholy dreams of chapter seventy-seven we see the abandonment of whatever hope Mason may have found in these images, with their promise of meaning and security in mortal life, sanctioned by greater powers who retain an interest in the events of the Earth:

The Monuments made no sense at all. They were not Statues, — they bore no inscriptions. They were the Night’s Standing-Stones, put there by some

Agency remote not in Time but from caring at all what happen'd to the poor fugitives who now scurried among them, seeking their brute impenetrability for cover. Whoever their Makers had been, they were invisible now, with their own Chronicles, their own Intentions,— whatever these were,— and they glided on, without any need for living Witnesses. (749)

This dream city, which Mason returns to nightly, is a rehearsal of his life, a vision of hopelessness before death, and thus an amalgam of Mason's failings. The flippancy of the passage's ending, however, with Death whistling Ditters von Dittersdorf and chatting like an unconcerned functionary, sees the narrator still asserting his detachment from the novel's burgeoning sentimentalism and his unwillingness, at this point, to invest wholly in Mason's melancholy, keeping readers, likewise, at an emotional remove.

### **Elizabeth and the *Mary and Meg***

Indeed, the sentimentalism of this chapter is bound up more with Dixon's character than it is with Mason's, because it is here that Dixon's domestic life comes into focus for the first time in the novel. While the return to England from St. Helena sees readers becoming well-acquainted with Mason's unhappy home life and his memories, all we learn of Dixon's family during this time is in chapter twenty-four, which includes the story of his parents' meeting by way of a pair of shoes, and the emotional fall-out from his father's death. In its contrast to Mason's family, this is important because the, albeit brief, vision we have of Dixon's home is one of communal harmony, shared values and a deeply loved, rather than viciously divisive, father figure. This threatening sentimentalism is kept to a minimum by the brevity of the scenes, but its potential intensity is manifest, most demonstrably in the interaction between Dixon's mother and his sister, Elizabeth. The story of the shoes is set up as one told by Dixon to Mason, but it is rendered in the narrator's voice and implicitly through the consciousness of Elizabeth, when, in the third paragraph, we are told that what we are reading is what "their daughter Elizabeth will come to believe" (238). We see no more of Elizabeth than her brief appearance in this chapter, as a moral and emotional focus, but the affect is disarmingly powerful, suggesting as it does a rich family life of stories and

common histories. This is particularly apparent in the moment at the culmination of the story of the shoes, where we witness an unheralded conversation between Elizabeth and her mother, bringing to us a compelling vision of the Dixon family life:

Neighbors came to think of his Mother as the cleverest woman ever to marry a Dixon. She pretended, however, that George was the clever one. "He usually reads my Mind," she told Elizabeth, "and if tha find an Husband who's fool'd as seldom, the happier thou'll be...? It saves thee all the day-in-and-day-out effort of trying to fool him, — fetch me that would you, beloved, — and upon the few occasions when thou *may* fool him, — why, it does wonders for thy Confidence."

"Tha've fooled him? Really, Mamma?"

"Once or twice. Beware a man who admires thy shoes. Thou may love him to distraction, but at the same time thou'll wish strongly to play tricks upon him, which though of an innocent nature, carry with them chances for misunderstanding. 'Tis not a pastime for the young, — I would urge thee for example to ease off upon the Raylton lad for the time being, and to concentrate upon thy Sums. Remember, she who keepeth the Books runneth the Business."

"He's so — "

"Yes."

"Oh, tha don't know."

"I know thee." A quick sweep of her palm down the Girl's Hair. "I see that gawpy Look." (240-1)<sup>29</sup>

While in chapter seventy-five Mason found "Dixon still gloomy about the death of his Mother [Mary]," in chapter seventy-seven we finally meet the other important woman in his life, Meg Bland, giving resonance to the name of the collier ship, the "*Mary and Meg*," which transports him to London and a mystical America in the concluding passage of chapter twenty-four (243-5). After Mason's clumsy efforts to nurse Dixon's gout-ridden foot, the latter announces that "Meg Bland is the only mortal, nothing personal, who may even breath too close to it" (751), leading to her first appearance, which, as with Elizabeth's earlier, despite its brevity, is affecting in its wealth of information:

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<sup>29</sup> In another flashback to *Vineland*, Mary's "fetch me that would you, beloved," a charming addition to this sentimental scene, recalls DL's rapprochement scene with *her* mother when, mid-dialogue, the latter asks: "Can you reach me that big spoon over there?" Pynchon, *Vineland* 121.



"Lucky me," says she, in the door straight as a Swift, a tall ginger-hair'd Beauty disinclin'd to pass her time unproductively. Margaret Bland gave up on marrying Dixon long ago, indeed these Days is reluctant, when the Topick arises, even to respond. "We'll have the Wedding just before we go to America," he said, — and, "We'll go to America as man and wife." For a while she was a good sport, and allow'd herself to be entertain'd with his Accounts of what Adventure and Wealth were there to seize, in that fabl'd place. But there soon grew upon her, as she had observ'd it in her mother, a practical disillusionment before the certainty of Death, that men for their part kept trying to put off as long as possible. She saw Jere doing just that, with his world of Maps, his tenderness and care as he bent over them, as herself, resign'd to tending him, — no different than man and wife, really. (751)

Not only this, but we and Mason, speaking like a Geordie and now the one "beaming an unmistakable inquiry" (502), also learn here elements of Dixon's history that his independent and womanising persona has kept hidden throughout, and the importance to him of his mother and sister is revealed in his naming his daughters after them:

"I love her," he tells Mason. "I say thah'.... Yet to myself I think, She's my last, my...how would tha say...?"

"She's a good Woman," Mason says, "thou must see that."

"Bringing me Cherries ev'ry day. For this," pollicating the Toe. Shaking his head, laughing in perplexity, he looks over at Mason, finds Mason looking at him, — "The Girls are mine."

Mason, who rarely these Days smiles, smiles. "Well. — Well, well, in fact." They sit nodding at each other for a while.

"Tha must've seen it in their Faces, in Mary...and Elizabeth, for fair...?"

We are, further, given a summary of Dixon's failed plans to return to America (753-4), and at its close we find an acceptance of family life and mortality that reveals him as closer to Mason, in his questing and moral vacillations, than we have previously realised, despite his own protestations to the contrary. Dixon came to recognise, we are told,

that his Life had caught up with him, and that his Death might not be far behind, and that America now would never be more real than his Remembrance, which he must take possession of, in whatever broken incompleteness, or lose forever.... "I was sure my Fate lay in America, — nor would I've ever predicted, that like thee I would swallow the Anchor and be claim'd again by the Life I had left, which I had not after all escap'd, — nor can I accurately say 'twas all Meg's doing, and the Girls', for I was never like thee, never one for Duty and so forth, being much more of a flirtatious Bastard, tha see, yet I couldn't leave them again. Thah' was it, really." (754-5)

## Fang Again

The above passage follows the dreams Mason and Dixon have of each other (752-3), emphasising again the importance of their mutual dream lives. Mason's dream is typically questing and hopeless, reviewing pertinent elements of his life and his perpetually thwarted quests, at something that is "nam'd the Royal Society, but is really something else": "Bradley is there, living and hale, — Mason keeps trying to find him, so that Dixon and he may meet, but each new Face is a new distraction, and presently he cannot find Dixon, either...." Dixon's dream is of course more hopeful, vaudevillian in tone and involving him and Mason performing in "cheap but serviceable suits" a song of their adventures. Dixon's sadness at his illness and imminent death is manifest in the contrast between this performance and his current state, seen when he "wakes briefly. 'It had damn'd well better be Bodily Resurrection, 's all I can say...?'"

Stories, dreams and representations; placement within or without narratives of obscure purpose, provenance or intention — these are, as Cherrycoke puts it, "how we dream'd of, and were mistaken in, each other" (696); resisting this, "poor cold Chronologies" seek to "reduce to certainty" the lives of which they tell. On the one hand, it is of sentimental moment that these latter chapters of *Mason & Dixon* involve an increasing reliance on realism; on the other hand, though, this realism remains in ambiguous tension with the representational fluidity the novel enjoys. It is in the dialogue between apprehended reality and the fantastical freedoms of this reality's narrated context that the sentiment of *Mason & Dixon*'s closing moments is most properly felt, because, unlike in the film, *Big Fish*, here the reader actually participates in pervasive representation as the *only* reality, rather than one that is reduced to certainty in the name of a sentimental exclusion.

Thus, when Mason and Dixon, chatting on the banks of the Wear, "hear swift footsteps close by, — and in a moment behold, approaching them, sniffing industriously, a Norfolk Terrier, of memorable Appearance" (755-6), the progress of their relationship in the novel comes full circle, and the

tension between reality and representation is played out in respect to this reincarnation of Fang. We can contrast these pages with the final scenes of *Big Fish*, where in the final moments there is established a clear demarcation between “truth” and fiction, along which the disgrace of the audience’s sentimental involvement lies: because they are reduced in the face of the illusory, sentimental “reality” of the film. The film does not, that is, implicate itself within the world of narrative creation. *Mason & Dixon*, by contrast, does not step back from itself in this manner, meaning narrative stances remain forever mistaken in each other, and “reality” is only an attitude we perceive within endless folds of representation: the “truth” of this narrative, upon which its sentiment relies, is the truth of the entire narrative, where a dog is as likely to talk as not and where what we assume to be “reality” abides alongside and in dialogue with the fantasy of its representation.

The reality status of Fang is never, that is, in question, and it is affirmed late in the novel when Mason approaches the Norfolk terrier, Snake, on the topic while at Thomas Cresap’s home. After Mason makes his approach, we are privy to Snake’s thoughts, which are at once serious and comic:

Snake ponders, — his policy with strangers, indeed with his very Owner all these years, being never to reveal his own Power of Speech, for he’s known others, including the credulous Fang in fact, who’ve trusted Humans with the Secret only to find themselves that very Evening in some Assembly Room full of Smoke and Noise, and no promise of Dinner till after they’ve perform’d. Not for Snake, thank you all the same. Something must be getting thro’ by way of his Eyebrows, however, for the Man is now smiling, lopsidedly, trying to seem cognizant. “You are said to be fond of Rats. Our Expedition Chef, M. Allègre, is preparing, as we speak, his world-famous *Queues du Rat aux Haricots*, if that be any inducement.”

More like an Emetick, Snake thinks, but does not utter. “Fond of Rats,” — who is this Idiot, anyway? (644)

A page earlier, the social life of the dogs here has been discussed, and half a page later Snake reflects more deeply, and we see Fang “humanised” even further than earlier in the novel, with vague references to a fate that speaks of suffering and preterition:

Old Fang. Who after all could claim to know Fang's true Story? Some saying he did it to himself, — others blaming the Humans who profited from his Strange Abilities. Tis not Snake's way to inform on another Dog, and withal, who knows what that Human was up to, wanting to see him after so much time? (645)

And talking dogs, of course, feature elsewhere in the novel, such as when Zhang and Eliza are escaping from the Jesuit College, leading to this entertaining moment:

They are challeng'd by Bulls, and chas'd by farm-dogs whose meanness is not improv'd by the doubtful Edibility of their intended Prey.

"That's what they call 'Chinese,' Buck."

"Not sure I'd want to eat that."

"Not sure you're going to catch that."

The other Dogs are pacing and posing like Wolves, putting on tight-lipp'd Smiles. "Well, they're fast, but, — "

" — not *that* fast...." (534)

Although the dog who visits in chapter seventy-seven, then, remains silent, the narrative regards him as cognizant: while the protagonists are talking, he waits, "as if not wishing to intrude"; having followed them to Dixon's house he makes "amiable acquaintance with the Dogs already resident there"; while Mason and Dixon chat, he "listens to them for as long as he may"; and when they are debating his name, he "ignores both [...] as if his true Name is one they must guess." The bias towards realism at this point in the novel does not, that is, act as a denial of the fantastical; rather, it is a knowing slippage in the direction of humanist seriousness, and the dog's dignity here abides in his silence, while Mason is "growing more and more anxious upon the Topick of canine Speech" (757). In other words, the foregrounding of the "real" here is a narrative move that depends for its effectiveness on the concomitant reality of the fantastical — because the protagonists' sensibilities are equally bound up in both: springing from the narrated worlds of the novel, our apprehension of them as human characters remains only at the behest of those worlds and their continuing self-referencing within those terms.

The point is brought home on these pages by the appearance of the mythical Lud Oafery, who is described here as "an otherwise unremarkable

person of middling age" (757). This contrasts with his earlier appearance as the growling four-legged creature, with a snout and claws, who spends his time tunnelling below ground and who changes under the full moon into the dandy, Master Ludowick (232-7). As "an otherwise unremarkable person of middling age," Lud's appearance here seems to threaten the veracity of the earlier accounts, settling the narrative's sentiment by way of a reduction of the fantastical into the comfortable realms of the real, but as the sentence continues we are told that Lud, "comes down out of the Willows and into the water, pretending to be a Pike in fierce Descent upon the Dace-Shoals, attempting to send all the Fish he may, into a Panick'd Stampedo," which Dixon then justifies as his "bit of Diversion, whenever he's above ground...? throw him a Chub, and he'll be off...?" The "true" story of Lud, then, remains tied up in representation and resists the kind of sentimental closure I found operating in respect of *Big Fish*. As with *Rashomon*, "it is all true and none of it's true."

The only realist acceptance we can bring to our experience of the novel, then, is an investment in its narrative dynamics that privileges no particular ontology or perspective implied within these. Even while we discern a movement towards realism in the sentimental denouement, this realism is captured within the unrelentingly self-conscious representations of the novel as a whole. While the parting scene at the end of chapter seventy-five is highly realistic, the close of chapter seventy-seven, the final moments of Mason and Dixon's time together, refers us back to the more fluid narrative truths that inhere in the novel's world. The perceived reality for the reader here is no less than in the earlier scene and is in a sense more deeply affecting, in that it recalls the importance of mutual dream-life and the signifying possibilities of otherworldliness for the novel and for the protagonists' relationship. It also dignifies their trials throughout and within the novel's representational games, joining these characters in a postulated eternity with the other creations of its manifold worlds: Fang provided the moment for their entrée into these worlds, and the novel thus rejoins these characters as it

approaches its own end and brings those worlds to a close. Finally, the typical optimism but atypical naivety of Dixon's closing remark provides a moment of touching bathos to his misreading of the dog's prophecy:

Close to dawn, dreaming of America, whose Name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist, Mason feels a cold Nose at his ear.

"When ye wake," whispers a youthful, South English voice, "I'll have long been out upon the Darlington Road. I am a British Dog, and belong to no one, if not to the two of you. The next time you are together, so shall I be, with you."

They wake early, — the Dog has gone. Dixon reports the same Nose, the same Message.

"Did we both dream the same thing?"

"I was awake...?"

"As certainly was I, —

"Then must we see him again, next year...?" (757)

## Attitudes and Departures (II)

And if it all were nought but Madmen's Sleep?  
The Years we all believ'd were real and deep  
As Lives, as Sorrows, bearing us each one  
Blindly along our Line's relentless Run....

Timothy Tox

The preceding discussion has seen my argument swing between the "Last Transit" section and earlier parts of the novel, articulating the sentimental focus that ultimately grows out of the narrating practices that are in perpetual dialogue throughout the novel. The final chapter, which I will deal with now, is awash with this sentimental tension, which I will discuss here in a reasonably straightforward manner: having established the principle issues either in the preceding discussion or at earlier points in this thesis, I will now work through the complex narrating movement of chapter seventy-eight, from start to finish, with fewer backwards movements, in a review of the sentimental concentration that we can find here, from the rapprochement between Cherrycoke and Wade LeSpark through to the final images we have of Mason's life and death, where not only this character, but the novel itself, makes a final play at dignity within the hopelessly limited scope of human

life. Of course, it is not possible here to recreate the sentimental effect, which manifests through the totality of the reading experience of the novel; rather, my intention is to bring to the surface the way this sentimental effect operates along the fluidity of narrating representation that is integral to the novel's meaningfulness: as throughout this discussion, then, I am attempting, in reference to this chapter's epigraphs, to articulate the way sentiment is captured in "how we dream'd of, and were mistaken in, each other," but understanding, nonetheless, that this is necessarily achieved only through the "poor cold Chronologies" of my own "caring mediocrity."

Chapter seventy-eight begins with a frame discussion about what made Mason return to America, burdened with (and burdening) a wife and young family, at such a late stage in his life (758-9). As throughout, the monological realism of the frame set-up means the opinions offered here are of no particular standing in terms of the novel's broader narration: despite the possible status we might be tempted to grant characters in this context, throughout the novel they (including Cherrycoke) demonstrate a simplicity of interpretation that is belied by the more complex understanding built into the narrative's rendering and, hence, the reader's intuition. After a line break, however, the frame setting remains, but it is at last infiltrated by the deeper possibilities of the novel's narrating practices, with the irrealist (yet more "real") bias of the novel's other worlds spilling over into the security of the LeSpark household. In contrast to *Big Fish*, then, rather than having the scope of narrative reduced to the certainty of the "real," here we have the "real" expanded into the scope of narrative:

When the Hook of Night is well set, and when all the Children are at last irretrievably detain'd within their Dreams, slowly into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese Sailors, the overflow'd from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia,—as if something outside, beyond the cold Wind, had driven them to this extreme of seeking refuge. They bring their Scars, their Pox-pitted Cheeks, their Burdens and Losses, their feverish Eyes, their proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be, whose shape none inside this House may know. (759)

The children are asleep now, as are Euphrenia and Elizabeth; Lomax, the drunkard, “wakes, sweating, from a poison’d Dream,” while the ultra-conservative Ives “is off at his Midnight Junto.” However, “Mr. LeSpark and the Rev<sup>d</sup> remain” as “[t]he Room continues to fill up, the Dawn not to arrive.” The people’s poet(aster), Timothy Tox appears and, welcomed by Cherrycoke, proceeds “to recite the *Pennsylvaniad*, *sotto Voce* as he wanders the Room, among the others, the untold others” (760).

This final vision of the LeSpark household brings to bear upon this centre of privilege and complacency the greater truthfulness of the novel’s narrative world of ungrounded, fluid narrating practices, in which humanist meaning is generated by way of a collective sharing of underdetermined representations. More than simply a capricious coup de theatre, however, this intrusion is of significant moment for our conception of Cherrycoke’s parallel narrative, which has been occurring alongside ours. As I have said, there is a harmony between this unknown narrative and that which we read: substantially unlike, they nonetheless traverse the same moral territory, consubstantiate. Thus, “unchosen Philadelphia” are Cherrycoke’s people, the passed over, the weak and powerless, in defense of whom he was originally driven out of England (9). The “unchosen” enjoy his moral sympathy throughout, and their invasion of the LeSpark household in *our* narrative points to the moral effectiveness of Cherrycoke’s own tale within *his* context: the unchosen voices he represents have made their way, through his narrative, into the consciousness of the LeSpark family. This is particularly the case in respect to Mason, the central figure of both stories, a hopeless figure whose preterition, as I have shown, is dignified in the novel we read; likewise, Cherrycoke has equally dignified “his” Mason in the story he has told, evidenced by Mr. LeSpark’s final action of the novel, where, the power relations between the two remaining all the while unambiguous, LeSpark indicates to us the affective effect of Cherrycoke’s tale, bringing our reading sensibilities into a harmony with his own altered state and providing for a sentimental moment of real-world hope and narrative closure that is



nonetheless shot through with the absurdity of its foundation in inequality. While Tox and the “untold others” wander the room, then, we observe this between the brothers-in-law:

“Will you be leaving before Christmas, Wicks?”

“What do I say? Your Servant, Sir.”

“I meant, that I should welcome your Company, as your Mediation, in visiting with Mr. Mason’s widow and Children, if they are yet in Town, tho’ I am d— —’d if I can see how to do it much before Epiphany, there being an Alarm Clock even next my Chamber-Pot, these Days.”

“Thanks to the American Society, they are here, and car’d for. I have heard that Mrs. Mason will return to England with the younger Children, whilst William and Doctor Isaac will remain.”

“Then I should like to meet them, in particular. Perhaps I may find a way to help.”

“Brother, you have Moments.”

“Aye,— we call ‘em Philadelphia Minutes.” (760)

This scene is followed by Franklin’s appearance at Mason’s rooms, just before the latter’s death, where the former “is greeted by an Odor he knows and would rather not have found.” After the farcical characterisation of Franklin in the earlier chapters, the realism here is in itself affecting. This is not so much because it is a reduction to certainty, given that, as a historical figure, Franklin’s “true” self always hovers in the shadows of his representation in this novel:<sup>30</sup> the appearance of that “true” self here is more to do with its dignifying of Mason through the regard of this figure. We recall, in other words, Mason’s discombobulation at meeting “the eminent Philadelphian quite by chance, in the pungent and dim back reaches of an Apothecary in Locust-Street” (266). Mason’s pretensions and social anxieties have him appear in that scene an officious imbecile after Dixon enquires as to how many cases of Daffy’s Elixir they should purchase:

Mason glares back, too keenly aware of the celebrated American Philosopher’s Eye upon them,— having hoped to project before it, somehow, at least the forms of Precedence,— but of course Dixon’s rustic Familiarities have abolish’d, yet again, any such hope,— one more Station of the Cross to

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, anecdotally I know of one reader who gave up on *Mason & Dixon* upon encountering the early representations of Franklin, offended at this mistreatment of such an “important” person.

be put up with. "Any matter of Supply falls into your area, Dixon. Have a word with Mr. McClean if you're not sure," hearing how it sounds, even as he goes on with it.<sup>31</sup> (267)

With Franklin's realist appearance at Mason's death bed in chapter seventy-eight, we find the latter finally achieving some dignity through the honest good opinion of one whose kind judgement he craved; the historical Mason, also, comes through the representation here, a man who, despite scant documentation surviving today, did indeed rub shoulders with the highest men of science in his day, including the historical Franklin. The meeting here between Franklin and Mason's wife, Mary, is touched also with the anxieties and fears of age, which have marked the novel throughout. A brief passage will illustrate the point:

She sinks with a sidewise contraction of her body onto a Couch design'd more to encourage the Illusions of Youth, than to console the Certainties of Age. Outside rackets the Traffic of Second Street.

"Please excuse me if I do not immediately sit, — at eighty, it requires some advance work, — so, my Sympathies must precede me."

She manages for him a Smile, whose muscular Cost he can feel in his own Face. He leans upon his Cane. (760-1)

The sentiment in the above scene derives from its eschewal of issues of status — *the* Benjamin Franklin is discoursing politely with Mason's unknown second wife — in its concentration on humanity in the face of death, which is ultimately the abiding theme of the novel. For Cherrycoke, for Franklin and for the reader, Mason's death (and death generally in a sentimental context) becomes a rehearsal for our own, in all its unfulfilled bathos.

The following page and half is analeptic, attempting "[t]o speak of the final seven years, between Dixon's death and Mason's, [which] is to speculate, to uncertain avail" (761), reintroducing the theme of this novel as imagined history. The narrative moves into the past tense, though, establishing for itself the perceived veracity of that narrating pose. The concluding paragraphs here

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<sup>31</sup> This is a good example of Mason's speech acts varying according to audience design, with Franklin here in the role of "auditor," according to Allan Bell's description, and consequently affecting Mason's speech patterns. Bell 158-61.

introduce an important sentimental subject for the chapter, however: the relationship between Mason and his younger son by Rebekah, Doctor Isaac. We have already seen, upon Mason's return from St. Helena and being reunited with his sons, that:

As ever, he is surpriz'd by the fierceness of their bodies, their inability to hold back, the purity of the not-yet-dishonest, — 'twould take a harder Case than Mason not to struggle with Tears of Sentiment. His relations look on, variously grimacing, sneering, or pretending not to see, all recalling his difficulties, in particular with Dr. Isaac, in even touching his Sons. (202)

The conversation between the boys here brings to the surface the issue of Doc's life and Rebekah's death, with Will assuring Doc that, contrary to what their grandfather, "a sour and beggarly old fool" (763) told him, he was "nam'd for Newton, whom Dad admires greatly." The manifest love and care between these two is an affirmation of their familial bond and a reminder of their relative unworldliness compared to their father: while they remain in Stroud, apprenticed to their grandfather and growing into the community, Mason himself has lived a whole other life, sailing the seas and visiting foreign lands. This tension sets up the following scenes between Mason and Doc.

Thus, when Dixon dies and Doc offers to go with Mason to Bishop, the father "finds he cannot refrain from telling his Son bedtime stories about Dixon" (763). Here, though, the narrator momentarily reasserts his potential within the narrative, and Mason's story of Dixon's adventure with Franklin's Leyden Jar is taken over in the comical manner we are accustomed to: Mason's voice is lost and the "realist" Franklin of a few pages earlier is now figured in a cartoon-like rendering. Recalling his own adventures with electricity, he tells Mason and Dixon that "[m]any's the time I've found myself out upon the Pavement, no memory of Removal from where I'd been, and a Hole in the Brick Wall between, about my Size and Shape" (764). This digression, which takes us back to the kinds of representational strategies that have marked the majority of the novel, concludes with a thoroughly electrified, cartoonish Dixon, his hair sticking out so forcefully it breaks his

queue-tie, and, on his face, “[w]hat might be call’d a Smile, is yet asymmetrick, and a-drool. His Eyeballs, upon inspection, are seen to rotate in opposite Senses, and at differing Speeds” (765).

We are, then, still reading amongst the fluid representations of the narrator’s voice, emphasising that the sentimental content here remains part of an ongoing dialogue within representation. That sentimental content begins to come into focus when Mason tells Doc of Dixon’s two daughters, and Doc postulates that his father was hoping for “Mason-Dixon Grand-Babies,” and

risks casting at his Father a direct look of provocation, that Mason finds he may no more flinch from, than answer to. For the next Hours, then, neither speaks more than he must, — at ease, for the first time together, with the Silence of the Day. ‘Twas what Dixon ever wish’d from him, — to proceed quietly. (766)

It is in this state that the subject of Rebekah comes up and “Doc flashes him a thoughtful look. ‘You never speak of her.’ Here they are,” the narrator tells us, “fallen upon the Drum-Head of the Day.” As if they needed to travel away from Sapperton to have this conversation, here, travelling north, they may. After stopping at a haunted inn and interrupting a highwaymen’s gathering, where Doc’s comical resourcefulness saves them from eviction or worse, he becomes privy to the story we never learn when “[a]t some point, invisible across the room, Doctor Isaac will ask, quietly, evenly, ‘When did you and she meet? How young were you?’” (767). The movement here into the future simple tense conveys the same sentimental air we encountered earlier: this is not happening now, in the corrupted present, but it *will* happen, sometime — perhaps when we are out of earshot.

This alerts our ear to the movement into the past tense for the following passage at Dixon’s grave. With this tense we encounter “true” history, which sanctions its deep sentiment as these two figures from Mason’s life, his mate and his son, come into renewed focus for him. I will quote the whole passage:

At Bishop they learn'd that Dixon had been buried in back of the Quaker Meeting-House in Staindrop. Doctor Isaac stay'd with his Father, step for step. At the grave, which by Quaker custom was unmark'd, Mason beseech'd what dismally little he knew of God, to help Dixon through. The grass was long and beaded with earlier rain. A Cat emerg'd from it and star'd for a long time, appearing to know them.

"Dad?" Doc had taken his arm. For an instant, unexpectedly, Mason saw the little Boy who, having worried about Storms at Sea, as Beasts in the Forest, came running each time to make sure his father had return'd safely, — whose gift of ministering to others Mason was never able to see, let alone accept, in his blind grieving, his queasiness of Soul before a life and a death, his refusal to touch the Baby, tho' 'twas not possible to blame him.... The Boy he had gone to the other side of the Globe to avoid was looking at him now with nothing in his face but concern for his Father.

"Oh, Son." He shook his Head. He didn't continue.

"It's your Mate," Doctor Isaac assur'd him, "It's what happens when your Mate dies." (767-8)

In terms of my discussion throughout this chapter, we find here an amalgam of emotional forces at work. Mason's guilt over Rebekah is entwined equally with his guilt over Doc, although it is never clearly drawn to our attention until now, and the figure of the cat here reminds us of the first description of Rebekah's ghost, where "[h]er eys have broken into white, and grown pointed at the outer ends, her ears are back like a cat's" (164). Dixon is the figure who has proved Mason's emotional saviour in his years of escapism and avoidance, the figure he had to let go of, at Rebekah's instruction, in his return to his family. These individuals, each unknown to the other, with Mason as their common ground, coming together, then, at this graveside, with the force of this history, and Mason's growing awareness of Doc's own, personal identity, define the sentimental power of the image, caught in the narrator's free adoption of a serious tone.

It is this scene that marks the endpoint of Mason's quest for absolution with respect to his troubled history. This, rising out of the text of the novel, means more to the reader than the earlier LeSparkian theories as to the late forms Rebekah's ghost may have taken on (758), or, indeed, the narrator's own postulates (762), all of which seek to explain Mason's return to America in terms of Rebekah. I will return to this shortly, but at this point my reading sees in this scene at Dixon's grave a closure with Rebekah, and Mason's

realisation, not hers, that it is time, finally, to “leave her to the Weather” if not also to “Forgetfulness” (166). Here, he, “[g]ood, living Charles” (172) has found good, living Doc, and the latter’s late discovery of his mother, through his father’s account, brings Rebekah into the appropriate realm of shared history, held together in narrative.

When we learn, in the following paragraph, that “[s]olitude grew upon him, despite his nominal return to the social Web-work” (768), this is not an equivocation as to the significance of the preceding scene; rather it is an acknowledgement that the difficulties of life proceed unrefracted by fleeting moments of epiphany. The sentimental is hinged irrecoverably to incompleteness and failed re-arrival. That two of the participants in the scene at Dixon’s grave have passed into the impossibility of death symbolises the impossibility of the hint of absolute return that is contained within the sentimental moment: unlike in the movies, life, in other words, goes on.

This following passage, then, takes up the other side of Mason’s quests throughout the novel: astronomy and the search for spiritual revelation in the stars. We have already learned of Mason’s “terror before the Third Dimension” in which the stars “had begun to take on for him the attributes of conscious beings” (731). This aspect of his questing, in the realm of science, which knows no humanist bottom-line, no sentiment for its own sake, but only rather the endless sentimental drive towards absolute transcendence through the agency of intellectual intuition, is never, for Mason, reconciled. Rather it becomes the site for his “madness,” for the hangovers of his past scientific life to visit and revisit his consciousness. We learn, then, that the “conscious beings,” even after he has renounced the stars, visited, “had names, and Titles, and signs of Recognition. Often they would approach through Number, Algorithms, the manipulation of Numbers and Letters, emerging as it were from among the symbols” (768). Mason’s scientific intuition has begun to transform into a scientific paranoia, tied up, we learn, with his continued sense of ill-treatment at the hands of scientific institutions, represented to him by the person of Maskelyne.

It is Maskelyne's name that hangs over Mason's sense of "Purgatory, — some antepenultimate blow" (769) at Herschel's discovery of Uranus (which Mason and Dixon did not, sadly, in this world at least, discover in the America of chapter seventy-three). Here the irascible old astronomer, carrying an impossible chip on his shoulder, feels "fore-inklings of the dark Forces of Over-Throw [...] small stinging Presences darting in from the periphery of his senses to whisper, to bite, to inject Venoms...Beings from the new Planet." This leads to the powerful passage in which all Mason's anger, hurt and disappointment, concentrated on the figure of Maskelyne (who both usurped Mason and who Mason, at St. Helena, saw "out of Disguise"), and tied up with his own professional failings, are articulated in a hellish vision of earthly corruption:

Mason has seen in the Glass, unexpectedly, something beyond simple reflection, — outside of the world, — a procession of luminous Phantoms, carrying bowls, bones, incense, drums, their Attention directed to nothing he may imagine, belonging to unknown purposes, flowing by thick as Eels, pauselessly, for how long before or after his interception, he could never know. There may be found, within the malodorous Grotto of the Selves, a conscious Denial of all that Reason holds true. Something that knows, unarguably as it knows Flesh is sooner or later Meat, that there are Beings who are not wise, or spiritually advanced, or indeed capable of Human kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting, — known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night, — and any who see them out of Disguise are instantly pursued, — and none escape, however long and fruitful be the years till the Shadow creeps 'cross the Sill-plate, its Advent how mute. Spheres of Darkness, Darkness impure, — Plexities of Honor and Sin we may never clearly sight, for when we venture near they fall silent, Murdering must be silent, by Potions and Spells, by summonings from beyond the Horizons, of Spirits who dwell a little over the Line between the Day and its annihilation, between the number'd and the unimagined, — between common safety and Ruin ever solitary....

When Mason and Maskelyne have their confrontation, Maskelyne's question to Mason, "[c]an you never get beyond it?" (771) is of moment: Mason cannot. There is not even partial redemption to be found in the political world that Maskelyne represents, and Mason's late astronomical insights, however visionary, are doomed to obscurity. His only satisfaction, insulting Maskelyne at The Mitre, is a sad recompense for his suffering.

We are now two pages from the end of the novel and we find ourselves back in Philadelphia, with Mason waking into a dream of a “single dark extended Petroglyph” among “the all-but-undamag’d remains of an ancient City [...] There is writing on some of the Structures, but Mason cannot read it. Does not yet know it is writing. Perhaps when Night has fallen, he will be able to look up, to question the Sky.” Still questing, then, still seeking, Mason has the dignity of being visited by Franklin in his final hours. The older man remains cheerful and evasive while Mason tries tell his him of what he has discovered in the sky and among the numerals of data: “‘Ah, you old Quizzer,’ Franklin tries to beam, Mason continuing to regard him, not pleading, but as if it didn’t matter much what Franklin thinks” (772). This final vision of a dying Mason, “eyes elsewhere, unclaimable,” is sentimental in its sense of unfulfilled hope and impossible revelation, forever kept beyond the limited possibilities of the articulate. This is death without the transcendent moment, or the final message, or the mystic insight. This is death as we know it: unreasonable, unforgiving, and hopeless, taking back into the earth the most personal of our thoughts, ever unspoken.

And it is the final passage of the novel that explains Mason’s return to America. Amid changes in tense that veer between an implication of the certainty assumed by a historical account – with the posterior past of “would” – and the promise and hope of an imminent future – with “will” – we learn that:

Mary would return to England with the younger Children, – William and Dr. Isaac, Rebekah’s Sons, would stay, and be Americans. Would stay and ensign their Father into his Death. Mr. Shippen, Rev<sup>d</sup> Peters, Mr. Ewing, all Commissioners of the Line twenty years earlier, now will prove, each in his Way, their Salvation upon this Shore. (772-3)

Following this, *Mason & Dixon* concludes with a movement into the past tense, which takes us back to an unknown previous time, with Doc and Will talking to their father:



"Since I was ten," said Doc, "I wanted you to take me and Willy to America. I kept hoping, ev'ry Birthday, this would be the year. I knew next time you'd take us."

"We can get jobs," said William, "save enough to go out where you were, —"

"Marry and go out where you were," said Doc.

"The Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope."

"The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick."

"We'll go there. We'll live there."

"We'll fish there. And you too." (773)

Having found a rapprochement with Rebekah in his acceptance of their sons, Mason finds in these the same wander-lust that drove him out of Stroud. The land of possibilities, where he and Dixon could not remain, is, he realises, nonetheless available to his boys, and from the utterly unreliable, sentimental representations of this novel, his reason for returning to America seems to be to give the opportunity to his sons of taking "proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be" (759).

## Conclusion

In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin writes:

Novelistic pathos always works in the novel to restore some *other* genre, genres that, in their own unmediated and pure form, have lost their own base in reality. In the novel a discourse of pathos is almost always a surrogate for some other genre that is no longer available to a given time or a given social force—such pathos is the discourse of a preacher who has lost his pulpit, a dreaded judge who no longer has any judicial or punitive powers, the prophet without a mission, the politician without political power, the believer without a church and so forth—everywhere, the discourse of pathos is connected with orientations and positions that are unavailable to the author as authentic expression for the determination of his purpose, but which he must, *all the same*, conditionally reproduce by using his own discourse.... For the person writing the novel there is no language to express a purely individualized pathos: he must, against his will, mount the pulpit, assume the role of preacher, judge, etc. There is no pathos without threat, without profanation, promises, blessings and so forth. In pathos-charged speech one cannot take the first step without first conferring on oneself some power, rank, position, etc. In this lies the “curse” of novelistic pathos when it is expressed directly.<sup>1</sup>

To the third-to-last sentence here, however, he adds a footnote: “We are speaking, naturally, only about that discourse of pathos that relates in a polemical and forensic way to another’s discourse, but not about the pathos of representation itself, the pathos inherent in the subject and that is itself therefore artistic and in no need of a specific conditioning.” What I have found in *Mason & Dixon* seems an amalgam of these two elements of pathos that Bakhtin refers to and which he goes on to speak of in respect to the sentimental novel. Pynchon’s rediscovery of sentimental pathos within the teleology of novelistic innovation involves his narrator’s ability to “mount the pulpit,” but without “conferring on [him]self some power, rank, position” by

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<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin 394-5.

“conditionally reproduc[ing]” “some other genre.” This is because the narrator of *Mason & Dixon* mounts his pulpit in the name of “the pathos of representation itself.” That is, in this novel we find a narrator whose very identity is only apprehendable as an agent of representation, and, in that, his sentimental speech is already charged with the pang of loss that inheres within representation. While his signifying method is categorically one of representing other discourses (and therein lies his commitment to Bakhtinian dialogism), it is the representation, not the discourses themselves, that is of the essence. His emotionally-driven speech, when he comes closest to polemical directness, is nonetheless *already* contained within a pervasive sense of the impossibility of that directness.

Thus, while Bakhtin finds that “pathos in the novel (and in literature in general), if it is authentic, shies away from discourse that is *openly* emotional, not yet separated from its subject,”<sup>2</sup> in *Mason & Dixon* the discourse is already, absolutely, separated from its subject, allowing for the incursions of the “*openly* emotional” that I have found in my last chapter. These incursions are, literally, hidden within a radical, thoroughgoing commitment to a discourse of representation, the apprehension of which is the necessary precondition for finding the illusion of reality that we anticipate encountering in fiction. The “*openly* emotional,” in this sense, is only invested with meaning to the extent that it is uncovered within manifest representation and with a sensibility already attuned to an engagement with this. Finally, then, the sentimental pathos of the novel, when it is spoken directly, is in fact doubled: it is, naively, the pathos of the human lives within the novel’s world; but, more profoundly, it is invigorated with the pathos of representation itself. This is not the disgraceful apprehension of an autonomous reality-in-the-inanimate that Jonathan Lamb finds in my discussion in chapter one (and which the modernists found in the transparency of nineteenth-century realism); rather, it is the sentimental striving towards the articulation of otherness that

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* 395.

knowingly invests itself – imaginatively, intellectually, and creatively – in this project of hopelessness.

My discussion of *Mason & Dixon* throughout this thesis has veered between two intractably complex and historically inflected discourses, alluded to in my brief restatement above: the novelistic sentimental, and its relationship with novelistic representation through the elusive figure of “the narrator.” While susceptible to a sentimentalist desire to bring these discourses to heel in a comprehensive theoretical statement, the fulfilment of this desire is not only beyond my own limited scope, but, I intuit, ultimately beyond the realms of criticism itself. In that respect, this thesis derives its use-value from the lessons I have drawn out of Pynchon’s novel, representing for the larger questions merely an incremental step in the asymptotic reaching towards the limit of closure that defines our contemporary understanding of the hopes for research and enquiry. *Mason & Dixon* offers, in that respect (and what more could we ask of art?), an insight into the incompleteness of the critical project and a pointer towards future dialogues, encounters and vocabularies, where the hegemonies of today may become the re-invigorated possibilities of tomorrow.

If this sounds like the language of romanticism, or even its shameful older sibling, sentimentalism, this should come as no surprise. While the compulsive avatars of both the romantic and the sentimental continue to abide in the discourses of, on the one hand, the avant-garde, the anarchic, or the spiritual-intellectual, and, on the other, the pop-cultural or the socio-political, the denial of each by the waning theorists of “postmodernity” looks increasingly absurd and, ironically, elitist. My interest in *Mason & Dixon*, as should by now be clear, springs from the rapprochement it enacts between the continually-privileged romanticism of the modernist (which, in its ongoing battle against conscription within market-driven – and sentimentalist – simulations, in fact thereby replenishes itself), and the disgraced (and frankly disgraceful) yearning that so palpably exists for the sentimental within popular culture. As deconstruction has taught us, it is

within language primarily that the hierarchical and the hegemonic subsist, and equally it is here that the repressed and dishonoured may be revived – if, that is, we remain committed to encountering this language with the investment in the imagination that its potentiality demands. The confounding yet inspirational irony that lies within the narrating tactics of *Mason & Dixon* is their recovery of sentimental simplicity through the impetus of modernist complexity, liberating the repression of the one while humbling the aggrandisements of the other.

The modernist impulse towards reinvention and redefinition persists in a possibly sentimentalist notion of inherent efficacy abiding in the renewal of representational tropes. Within the postmodern this impulse is manifest in areas of our culture that were unknown, or inchoate, at the high point of the modernist movement: in popular music and television, particularly, the drive towards making it new has not been as much at the behest of capitalist imperatives as might be imagined; rather, the latter is attuned to the possibilities of appropriation that this drive throws up. If Eric Cartman is more real to us than Alex P. Keaton, this alerts us to possibilities within the arena of representation, perceived as such, that can inform our critical practice with renewed articulations of the aesthetic and intellectual impostures represented by realism.

At the same time, however, simplistic notions of what that realism is are manifestly unhelpful, and it behoves us to consider, as my reading of *Mason & Dixon* has hopefully suggested, the extent to which our reading practices are informed by a sentimentally reflective apprehension of the conditions of meaning residing in text, where manners of representation may be more than what they appear. That is, my thinking around *Mason & Dixon's* narrated sentiment has led me increasingly further from an easy conception of the narrating role in *any* narrative fiction, and to suspect that the kinds of fluidity I have encountered in Pynchon's novel potentially inhere in formally distinct incarnations among the modes of novelistic signification that this work would seem to surpass. I wonder, that is, whether critical practice might

be better to *not* assume a singular identity attaching itself to, say, Marlow, and to consider rather the linguistic modalities that underwrite this temptation: narratology gestures towards such practice but falls back, alarmingly at times, on literalist conceptions born of nothing more than convention and consensus: specifically, narrators, characters and points of view, as well as the neat encasement of these within unbending patterns of chronological time.

Perhaps, I am suggesting, reading pleasure and practice rests on “how we dream of, and are mistaken in, each other” more than on our own contingent notions of the possibility of realism and the meaningfulness, in this world or that, of the discreet subject’s time, place or “identity.”

Calling attention to our conditioning within the contingencies of history, Michael Bell has compellingly observed that “[s]entimentalism and utilitarianism share an almost instinctive ill-repute although, by the continuing logic of supplementarity, the way of avoiding the one is usually by shifting momentarily to the other so that the general degree of dependence on both remains undetected.”<sup>3</sup> The modernist disparagement of the sentimental seems a case in point. If the languages of fiction should teach us anything, it is the necessity that we be alert to our own susceptibility within the irrational systems of meaning we perpetually, in seeming good faith, invoke. By confounding us with the disruptive and the unexpected, novelistic discourse has the capacity to invert our preconceptions with irruptions of meaning that we ourselves make real.

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<sup>3</sup> Bell, *Sentimentalism* 51.

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